

PRABUDDHA BHARATA

or AWAKENED INDIA

A monthly journal of the Ramakrishna Order
started by Swami Vivekananda in 1896



June 2018

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THE ROAD TO WISDOM

SWAMI VIVEKANANDA ON

The Genius of Sri Krishna V

‘Thou thyself art thy only friend, thou thyself thy only enemy. There is no other enemy but this self of mine, no other friend but myself.’ This is the last and greatest lesson, and Oh, what a time it takes to learn it! We seem to get hold of it, and the next moment the old waves comes. The backbone breaks. We weaken and again grasp for that superstition and help. Just think of that huge mass of misery, and all caused by this false idea of going to seek for help! For every weakening thought you have put into anybody’s head you will have to pay with compound interest. The law of Karma must have its pound of flesh. There is only one sin. That is weakness. When I was a boy I read Milton’s *Paradise Lost*. The only good man I had any respect for was Satan. The only saint is that soul that never weakens, faces everything, and determines to die game. Stand up and die game! Do not add one lunacy to another. Do not add your weakness to the evil that is going to come. That is all I have to say to the world. Be strong! You talk of ghosts and devils. We are the living devils. The sign of life is strength and growth. The sign of death is weakness. Whatever is weak, avoid! It is death. If it is strength, go down into hell and get hold of it! There is salvation only for the brave. None but the bravest deserves salvation. You believe in God. If you do, believe in the real God. ‘Thou



are the man, thou the woman, thou the young man walking in the strength of youth, thou the old man tottering with his stick.’ Thou art weakness. Thou art fear. Thou art heaven, and Thou art hell. Thou art the serpent that would sting. Come thou as fear! Come thou as misery! All weakness, all bondage is imagination. Speak one word to it, it must vanish. Do not weaken! There is no other way out. Stand up and be strong. No fear. No superstition. Face the truth as it is! If death comes, let it come! We are determined to die game. That is all the religion I know. I have not attained to it, but I am struggling to do it. I may not, but you may. Go on! Where one sees another, one hears another, so long as there are two, there must be fear, and fear is the mother of all [misery]. Where none sees another, where it is all One, there is none to be miserable, none to be unhappy. [There is only] the One without a second. Therefore be not afraid. Awake, arise, and stop not till the goal is reached!

From *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, (Kolkata: Advaita Ashrama, 2016), 1.463-64.



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MAYAVATI APPEAL

Date: 15 April 2018

Dear Devotee,

Please accept our hearty greetings from the sacred and majestic Himalayas. As you are aware, Advaita Ashrama, Mayavati, Uttarakhand, branch of the Ramakrishna Math, Belur Math, India was very dear to Swami Vivekananda, as he had desired a Centre in the sacred of Abode of Shiva where sincere spiritual aspirants could engage in Advaitic studies and spiritual practices.

Started in 1899 by Swami Vivekananda through his English disciples Captain and Mrs Sevier. This ashrama is a branch of Ramakrishna Math, Belur Math, West Bengal founded by Swami Vivekananda in 1897. The Advaita Ashrama runs a hospital serving underprivileged patients of the local areas within the radius of 100 kms. The ashrama also houses the editorial department of *Prabuddha Bharata*, a monthly English journal started by Swamiji in 1896, which was shifted to Mayavati in 1899.

Conservation of Heritage Buildings

The original building that was sanctified by a fortnightly visit of Swamiji was constructed in the 1850s and is a heritage building. The main building of *Prabuddha Bharata*, a monthly English journal started by Swamiji, shifted to Mayavati in 1899, was constructed in 1914 and is also another heritage building. These buildings being more than 100-year old are in a dilapidated state and needs to be thoroughly conserved by taking up appropriate methods of restoration urgently. Their conservation and maintenance in the remote area of Mayavati is a formidable task. This project has been taken up by expert conservationists from Pune & Mumbai. The conservation work was inaugurated by the President of Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, Srimat Swami Smarananandaji Maharaj on 23 March 2018.



Our Present Need

We need to do the following for the preservation of these buildings sanctified by Swami Vivekananda and other great swamis of the Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission:

- The conservation will be done in three phases as given below:
- Phase I: Main Ashrama Building—Estimated Cost Rs. 1.97 crores
- Phase II: *Prabuddha Bharata* Building—Estimated Cost Rs.0.76 crore
- Phase III:
- Captain Sevier's Cottage—Estimated Cost Rs.56 lakhs
- Mother Sevier's Cottage—Estimated Cost Rs. 44 lakhs

We earnestly appeal for your valuable contribution towards the successful implementation of this noble project aimed at restoring these heritage buildings. All donations may be sent in favour of "ADVAITA ASHRAMA" BY CHEQUE/Demand Draft/NEFT whose details are given below.

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- All donations are exempt from Income Tax under section 80G (5) of the Income-tax Act, 1961.

Without your valuable contribution and cooperation, it would be impossible for us to complete this noble project of conserving these very old Heritage Buildings of remote area at Himalaya to give them a new lease of life of another 100 years.

We sincerely pray to Sri Ramakrishna, Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi and Swamiji to bestow their grace on you and your family.

Thanking you,
Yours in service,
Swami Muktidananda
Adhyaksha,
Advaita Ashrama, Mayavati

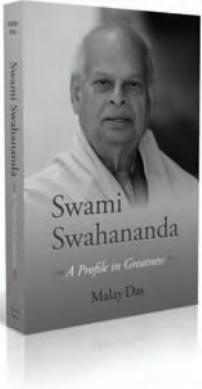
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SWAMI SWAHANANDA *A Profile in Greatness*

by Dr. Malay Das

The spiritual head of the Vedanta Society of Southern California for thirty-six years, Swami Swahananda, a direct disciple of Swami Vijnanananda, worked ceaselessly to spread Sri Ramakrishna's message. He established seventeen centers and sub-centers throughout the United States and has left the Ramakrishna movement in the West a rich legacy.

In this intimate, loving portrait, Dr. Malay Das presents Swami Swahananda as he knew him during the last seventeen years of the swami's life. We witness the guru's compassionate care for devotees and disciples, his ability to love with detachment, and his dignity and grace during his final illness.

Written in a simple, lucid and entertaining style, this spiritual biography will inspire sincere spiritual seekers from all traditions and offer them a glimpse into the wonderful life and work of this great monk and spiritual leader.



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Arise! Awake! And stop not till the goal is reached!

Maitrayaniya Upanishad

June 2018
Vol. 123, No. 6

मैत्रायणीयोपनिषत्

द्वे वाव ब्रह्मणो रूपे कालश्चाकालश्चाथ यः प्रागादित्यात् सोऽकालोऽकलोऽथ य आदित्याद्यः स कालः सकलः
सकलस्य वा एतद्रूपं यत् संवत्सरः संवत्सरात् खल्वेवेमाः प्रजाः प्रजायन्ते संवत्सरेणेह वै जाता विवर्धन्ते संवत्सरे
प्रत्यस्तं यन्ति तस्मात् संवत्सरो वै प्रजापतिः कालोऽन्नं ब्रह्मनीडमात्मा चेत्येवं ह्याह ।

कालः पचति भूतानि सर्वाण्येव महात्मनि ।

यस्मिंस्तु पच्यते कालो यस्तं वेद स वेदवित्॥

॥ ६.१५ ॥

*Dve vava brahmano rupe kalash-chakalash-chatha yah prag-adityat so'kalo'kalo'tha ya adityad-
yah sa kalah sakalah sakalasya va etad-rupam yat samvatsarah samvatsarat khalv-evamah prajah
prajayante samvatsareneha vai jata vivardhante samvatsare pratyastam yanti tasmāt samvatsaro
vai prajapatih kalo'nnam brahma-nidam-atma chety-evam hy-aha.*

Kalah pachati bhutani sarvany-evam mahatmani.

yasminstu pachyate kalo yastam veda sa vedavit.

(6.15)

There are indeed two forms of Brahman, time and the timeless. That which is prior to the sun is timeless, without parts. But that begins with the sun is time, which has parts. Indeed, the form of that which has parts is the year. From the year, indeed, these beings are born. By the year, indeed, after having been born they grow. In the year they disappear. Therefore, the year, indeed is Prajapati, is time, is food, is the abode of Brahman, is the self. For it has been said: 'Time cooks all beings, indeed in the great self. One who knows in what time is cooked, is the knower of the Veda.'

(6.15)

THIS MONTH

OUR BODY gives us many signals that are essentially signals from our mind. And the mind too, wavers from what we want to focus upon, because it wants to detract us from disciplining it. These signals of the body and the mind and the ways to overcome them are discussed in **The Psychological Itch**.

Literature on Sri Ramakrishna and his teachings have flooded the literary corpus of all major Indian languages. Unless Sri Ramakrishna's life and teachings are retold or translated into the vernaculars, the regional populace do not get the advantage of immersing themselves in the sagacity of this wisdom and start the pursuit of realising the essence contained therein. In Kannada too, Sri Ramakrishna's life and teachings have led to a great corpus of literature. Many great luminaries have worked towards the building of such corpus and this tradition is continued by many more contemporary scholars. The modern Renaissance period of Kannada language was also the golden age when Sri Ramakrishna, the incarnation of the modern age was introduced to Kannada knowing people by well-known poets and prose writers. Swami Vireshananda, Assistant Minister, Vedanta Centre of Sydney, writes about this in **Sri Ramakrishna in Kannada Literature: A Bird's Eye View**.

There are various methods of spiritual practice and we should not look down upon any path or consider any path to be superior than the others. Swami Pavitrnananda, former Minister-in-charge, Vedanta Society of New York discusses this in **Forms of Spiritual Practice**. This is an

edited transcript of a talk delivered at the Vedanta Society of New York on 17 January 1954.

Meditations on the Upanishads are the class notes on the Upanishads given on Wednesday evenings by Revered Swami Shraddhananda, former Minister-in-charge, Vedanta Society of Sacramento, in 1979. These class notes were taken down in shorthand in 1979 by Cleo aka Satyamayi Anderson and were transcribed many years later with the help of others. The notes are not verbatim and have been edited by Lali Maly and the third instalment is being given in **Meditations on the Upanishads**.

Many wonderful nuggets of wisdom contained in ancient scriptures are difficult to understand. In *Balabodha*, such ancient wisdom is made easy. This month's topic is **Guna**. Understanding this popular word is necessary to understand its meaning.

Even if a person sincerely approaches God for one's wellbeing in this world, that can eventually lead to devotion. This is shown in the third instalment of the story **The Miracle that Brought Faith**. This story is this month's *Traditional Tales* and has been translated from the Tamil book *Arulneri Kathaigal*.

Gloria Origgi, a Paris-based philosopher, a blogger in English, French, and Italian, a senior researcher at the Institut Jean Nicod at the National Centre for Scientific Research, and the author of a book on trust and another on the future of Internet writing, has written the book **Reputation: What It Is And Why It Matters**. From this book, we bring you this month's *Manana*.

The Psychological Itch

REMEMBER WHEN YOU SAT for meditation and you could not proceed any further because of that persistent itch on your leg, hand, or some other part of your body? You perhaps thought that it was some insect that was annoying you or that it was a mosquito that you could not catch in time, or that it was a rash or skin problem, which you did not notice earlier. The problem subsides with some itching and completely disappears when you leave your meditation seat. You go about your work thinking that your meditation was alright except for those distracting thoughts and this annoying itch!

What happened to the itch? Where did it go? How did it come? To understand this, we have to understand what happens during any form of meditation. While meditating, the meditator tries to bring one's mind and thoughts under control. There is an effort to streamline the process of thinking and then to regulate the thoughts or flow of ideas. This is done in many ways but the whole exercise is meant to bring some discipline to the mind. But the mind is responsible for almost all the actions we perform and excepting the rarest breed of people who have completely mastered their minds, the mind dictates what to do and what not to do, all the time. So, when the mind sees that discipline is being enforced upon it, it very strategically diverts the attention of the meditator to something else, and in the present example, it is an itch. However, if we were to use the word 'itch' in a metaphorical sense, we would immediately realise that it can mean many other things where

our mind plays tricks on us and tries to divert our attention to things that take us away from our pursuit of controlling or disciplining the mind.

The irresistible temptation to scratch an itch is the mind's dictate to cajole it.

Let us first look at the causes of a physical itch, the kind that makes us scratch our skin. It is interesting to note that an itch on the skin is caused mainly because of our instinct to survive or protect ourselves, just like the psychological itch created by the mind for protecting itself! The physical itch is caused because we think, that is, our brain thinks that some insect has tried to attack our skin, lay its eggs on the skin, or something else that would risk our health. And so, the brain tells our fingers to scratch that part of the body to ensure that we are safe and immune to attacks by unknown creatures. Itching is a protection mechanism of our neurological system just like pain. In fact, the nerve carrying the sensations of pain and itching are the same.

This psychological itch is used by the mind to protect itself whenever we try to discipline it or try to kill it by annihilating all thoughts, in order to transcend the mind and know our true nature, Brahman. How do we know that itching is psychological? We know that because scientists have successfully caused itching in a healthy human arm that has been fully deprived of any sensation by anaesthesia. So, itching is completely a mental or psychological phenomenon. Other than exposure to certain food, chemicals,

unclean clothes, or unhygienic surroundings, most causes for itching, particularly the itching that starts when you start your meditation and remains during the period of meditation, are completely psychological.

What are the other kinds of itching that are psychological but not the kind that creates irritation on the skin? This is a metaphorical kind of itch. This itch is the disturbance in your mind that asks you to do something other than meditation or the controlling of thoughts. For instance, when you are meditating, this itching will impel you to stop meditating and sing some devotional hymns instead. Now, you would consider singing of devotional hymns harmless, won't you? But, when this singing is done in the midst of your meditation, it is definitely harmful. Or, your mind could tell that you have had enough of meditation—you too don't like to look at your watch and find the reality that the meditation has been for hardly five minutes—and that you should study some scriptures or the life and teachings of some saint now. The mind has successfully made you believe that you are doing something very spiritual and at the same time obviated the possibility of its being controlled or disciplined. Sometimes, the mind also asks you to get up from your meditation and attend to some work that you had completely forgotten and remembered just when you sat for meditation. This is also a trick of the mind. It could have reminded you of that task before, but it keeps it hidden and brings it out as its trump card, just when you want to discipline or restrain it. Not just that, it creates an urgency and tells you that you have to attend to that task immediately.

Essentially, all distractions of the mind can be called psychological itches. All addictions are also psychological itches, only of the worst kind. An addiction feeds off a psychological itch that

you have. One has to identify that itch and go to its roots. For instance, if a person is addicted to a particular video game, then that is only the tip of an iceberg, or more accurately, the tip of a psychological itch. That person has to identify the itch, which could be loneliness, anxiety, the effect of a trauma, or any other mental problem.

A psychological itch can turn into a chain reaction. If you scratch your arm, you feel an itch on your neck, if you tackle that, you feel another itch on your face. This chain goes on. The first step to conquer an itch is to break the chain. Relax your mind and body and think of how each itch or addiction is independent of the other. Calm your mind and try to think ennobling thoughts; think about your true nature that is all consciousness and bliss. Try to think what makes you the most anxious and try to think of the worst possible outcomes of that event. By practising in this manner, you can clear your mind of all the cobwebs that cause that psychological itch.

The best way to avoid or get rid of a psychological itch is to ignore it. Do not scratch an itch. Scratching does not help. The irresistible temptation to scratch an itch is the mind's dictate to cajole it. If a game is drawing you to the point that you are unable to do anything other than gaming, it has already become a problem. That is indeed the definition of an addiction: it entices you to do something that in itself is the reward and so you are unable to do anything else. Thus, itching itself becomes a reward and one gets a pleasant feeling scratching one's skin. The thrill is in the performance of the addictive habit itself, in scratching the itch itself. It is very difficult to stop scratching an itch, because the itch came into existence in the first place due to the trick that the mind played in bringing about distraction. That is why one has to stop giving any importance to the itch to stop it.



Sri Ramakrishna in Kannada Literature: A Bird's Eye View

Swami Vireshananda

Historicity of Kannada literature

KANNADA BELONGS to the Dravidian family of languages. It is the official language of the south Indian state of Karnataka. The history of the Kannada language can be traced back to the sixth century CE. It is divided into three linguistic phases: Old, 600–1200 CE; Middle, 1200–1700 CE; and Modern, 1700–present. The period 1900–25 CE marks the modern Renaissance period of Kannada language. It was the time when writers brought new ideas to the native literature and adopted innovative styles of writing suited to the modern period. It was also the golden age when Sri Ramakrishna, the incarnation of the modern age was introduced to Kannada knowing people by well-known poets and prose writers.

D V Gundappa (1887–1975)

D V Gundappa, fondly called DVG, is a doyen of Kannada literature. He composed a poem in praise of Sri Ramakrishna in the early twentieth century. Dr H N Muralidhar writes that DVG 'opened the floodgates for the spread of Sri Ramakrishna's message by this maiden lyrical presentation'.¹ He also opines that it is DVG, who wrote poems on Sri Ramakrishna for the first time in Kannada. The poem titled 'Ramakrishna Paramahansa' contains elevated thoughts on the significance of the life and teachings of



Sri Ramakrishna's Image at Ramakrishna Math, Bengaluru

the Master, the free rendering of a part of which reads as follows: 'Sri Ramakrishna is the harmoniser of different religions as well as philosophies. He is the seer of the essence of Vedanta. He belongs to the clan of great teachers like Acharya Shankara. He is compassion incarnate. Also, through his experience Sri Ramakrishna resurrected the significance of all major religions including Christianity and Islam for the welfare of whole humanity. Swamiji himself worshipped the lotus feet of Sri Ramakrishna. This

is the divine glory of Sri Ramakrishna, who was a great Yogi.²

DVG says that Sri Ramakrishna belongs to the clan of great teachers like Acharya Shankara, which is noteworthy. In a period, when orthodoxy was much prevalent and also when Sri Ramakrishna was still unknown to many, DVG took a revolutionary stand of equating Sri Ramakrishna with Acharya Shankara, which is really remarkable.

Nangapuram Venkatesha Iyengar

The credit of bringing out the first ever compilation of Sri Ramakrishna's sayings goes to Nangapuram Venkatesha Iyengar. The first edition of this volume was published in 1916. It is the Kannada rendering of the sayings of Sri Ramakrishna in English compiled by Swami Abhedananda. The foreword to this book is written by Doddabele Narayana Shastri, a noted scholar of that time. In his foreword, Shastri addresses Sri Ramakrishna thus: 'O Ramakrishna Paramahansa! Your utterances are like sweet sugar. But, when the tongue has lost its power to taste, even the sugar tastes bitter. What can one do in such a circumstance? Our religion is in a pitiable condition like that of a flock of sheep without a shepherd. Our people blindly follow anybody and everybody with conflicting opinions.'³

Narayana Shastri continues in the same vein: 'When we get rid of such partial attitude through discrimination and examine the gem like nuggets of wisdom found in this collection of sayings with a pure mind, we find no trace of blemish at all. A devout person will certainly attain emancipation, when this garland of sayings, which is invaluable and adorable, adorns his heart and soul' (vi). Beautiful sentiments indeed!

Nangapuram Narayana Iyengar writes on the significance of the life of Sri Ramakrishna in his opening remarks as follows: 'This book contains

the priceless teachings of Sri Ramakrishna. These sayings have come out of his lips like the flow of nectar. The life of Sri Ramakrishna is wonderful in the sense that it is beyond the realm of an ordinary human being ... The essence of Vedanta itself shines forth in the teachings of the Paramahansa ... His sayings are acceptable to one and all. This great sage has realised the true philosophy behind all the religions (vii).

At the end of this book, there is an *arati*, vesper song, dedicated to Sri Ramakrishna composed in metrical style.

T S Venkannaiah (1885–1939) and A R Krishnashastry (1890–1968)

The first biography of Sri Ramakrishna in the Kannada language appeared in 1919 under the title *Sri Ramakrishna Paramahamsa Charitre*. This small but historically significant volume was written jointly by T S Venkannaiah and A R Krishnashastry, often referred to as the *Ashvini Devatas* of the Kannada renaissance period. The significance of the incarnation of God in the form of Sri Ramakrishna has been brought out scholastically by the authors as follows:

When we analyse the lives of incarnations like Buddha, Acharya Shankara, Acharya Ramanuja, and Jesus Christ, we can come to the conclusion that they all give up their bodies only after having fulfilled their life mission, that is, rejuvenating dharma by the discovery and then removal of the root cause of its decline. In the same manner, Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa incarnated at a period when the whole nation was swept away by the strong current of western civilisation, as a result of which, people had lost belief in transcendental spiritual values and engrossed themselves in scepticism and atheism. We can safely state here that the main objective of his birth was to resurrect true religion, by uprooting cynicism, the main cause for the weakening of spirituality in this modern

age, which is an upshot of several factors including the predominance of Western science.⁴

According to the authors of this book, Sri Ramakrishna removed doubts of devotees regarding matters concerning God, otherworld and the like, thereby showing them the right path of spiritual life. Faith is of paramount importance in spiritual life. Intense faith coupled with longing for God is the only requirement in all spiritual pursuits. This truth is demonstrated by Sri Ramakrishna, through his own example. Is it not a fact that in the beginning, he realised God only through faith and devotion, without any formal grounding in Vedanta and yoga?

The present book, written in a simple and lucid style, is analytical in nature rather than descriptive. It is mainly based on *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Lilaprasanga*, the magnum opus of Swami Saradananda. It is interesting to note that Swami Videhananda, an inmate of Ramakrishna Math, Bangalore at that time, helped the authors in going through about 1,500 pages of the *Lilaprasanga* in original Bengali. This information is gratefully given by the learned authors in their introduction.

Apart from co-authoring a short biography of Sri Ramakrishna, T S Venkannaiah translated the first part of the *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Lilaprasanga* and published it in the year 1923. The translation of *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Lilaprasanga* by T S Venkannaiah is very lucid with short sentences in a simple style. It is a direct translation from Bengali to Kannada. It is unfortunate that the author passed away before he could take up the translation of the next part.

The publisher, N Venkatesha Iyengar, had plans to bring out other parts in the form of a bimonthly periodical, which is evident in his submission at the beginning of this book. His intention was to publish the whole work, after serialising in the journal. Iyengar also wanted to bring

out Swami Vivekananda's works in Kannada beginning with 'Talks with Swami Vivekananda'.⁵

This may be construed to be the maiden attempt to start a periodical in Kannada entirely devoted to Ramakrishna-Vivekananda literature. However, this dream was realised only after a long gap of seventy-seven years when *Viveka Prabha*, when the official magazine of the Ramakrishna Order was started in the year 2000.

S G Govindaraja Iyengar

The first ever attempt to translate *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita* or *The Gospel of Ramakrishna* into Kannada was made by S G Govindaraja Iyengar, whose work was published in 1925. It was named *Sri Ramakrishna Vachanamrita* in Kannada.

In his introduction, the translator speaks about the uniqueness of Sri Ramakrishna's incarnation:

When the unrighteous paths prevailed over righteousness in this world, the compassionate supreme Lord thought as follows: 'I have shown the path of righteousness through the teachings of great ones from time to time depending upon place and circumstance. However, people are still groping in the darkness of ignorance due to the predominance of Kali. They are also suffering by engaging themselves in evil practices and useless disputes. It is imperative that I should show them the true goal of each religion, lest there be disaster.' Having pondered over like this, out of his infinite mercy, the great Lord appeared in the form of Sri Ramakrishna in Bengal in 1836. ... The Master became an adept in yoga at a very young age. Then he proceeded to practise all popular sects of India including Vedic sects like Shaiva, Vaishnava, Shakta, and so on, and also foreign sects like Christianity. He practised all of them according to their traditions and realised the same Brahman, the unitary principle in each such path. ... This man, verily an incarnation of the divine went on to clear all doubts in matters of religion

and spirituality. He also advised his followers not to blame men belonging to other religions out of pride. He stressed on the fact that one can realise the absolute by worshipping one's own chosen deity by following particular sect. Through this, Sri Ramakrishna brought about harmony among all the religions and showed that there is no reason for hatred and jealousy on account of differences among the religions.⁶

R R Diwakar

Ranganath Ramachandra Diwakar (1894–1990) was a scholar and also a political leader. He was a freedom fighter and an ardent follower of Gandhian principles. He was a member of Constituent Assembly, Minister of Information and Broadcasting of the Government of India (1948–52) and Governor of Bihar (1952–57). A scholar in English, Kannada and Sanskrit, his works in Kannada and English reflect his penetrating insight into philosophy, culture, and yoga. An admirer of Aurobindo, he had written his biography in English which has been translated into several languages. He has also written a detailed biography of Sri Ramakrishna, which was first published in 1956 by Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan.

Diwakar read Swamiji's lectures on his Master published by G A Nateshan of Madras in 1910, when he was preparing for his matriculation examinations. He says that he read it with great avidity and his absorption was so great that he read them while his examinations were going on. He writes: 'I came to think very highly of the person who had the capacity to inspire our great hero, Vivekananda. That was my first reverential curiosity for the career of this extraordinary saint. Since then I must have read lot about Ramakrishna. Ultimately, I came to write a book in Kannada entitled *Sri Ramakrishna Charitamrita* in 1931. It was then that I read through the five volumes of *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Lila Prasang* written in Bengali by Swami Saradanand.'⁷ The

Kannada book written by R R Diwakar could not be traced by the present author till the writing of this essay.

K V Puttappa aka Kuvempu (1904–94)

Kuvempu is the pen name of the celebrated Kannada poet K V Puttappa. He is the first of the eight Jnanpith awardees from Karnataka. He is also the foremost among the illustrious and talented poets who illuminated the Kannada literary horizon like bright stars in the modern era. Kuvempu drew his inspiration from Sri Ramakrishna and Swamiji, whose all-pervading influence overwhelmed him even during his younger days. Hence, it is no surprise that the most famous biography of Sri Ramakrishna in Kannada was authored by none other than Kuvempu. The book, published in 1934, still enjoys wide popularity among Kannada readers, which is a fitting testimony for its great literary merit and universal appeal. Kuvempu was a born poet and even his prose writing is full of poetic sentiments and rhythm. The way he describes the first ever transcendental experience of Sri Ramakrishna is both enchanting and refreshing. We deem it as impossible to bring the beauty of the language and literary style, Kuvempu displays in his work into any other language including English. Yet we attempt to present here for the sake of our readers the translation made by one of the leading literary figures in Kannada language, Dr Prabhu Shankara, who also was an ardent devotee of Sri Ramakrishna and a close associate of the Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission for the last six decades.

'I was walking on a narrow path in between the rice-fields, munching some puffed rice. All of a sudden, I raised my head and glanced at the sky. I chanced to view, at the far off horizon, a huge dark cloud, deep blue in colour, carrying rain water. Instantly, it extended itself and

covered the entire sky. Instantaneously a herd of white birds flew from the fields and moved past the clouds. In the background of dark clouds, the row of birds, as white as snow formed into straight and curved lines enthralled me. My soul perceiving the juxtaposition of the colours travelled far and merged with eternity. I lost consciousness and fell down. The parched corn I was munching got scattered on the ground. A kindly passerby carried me home. Even after I gained consciousness, my heart was filled with some ineffable joy. That was the first experience of ecstasy I had in my life.⁷

It was 'beauty' that led him to the realisation of the divine. If the supreme Reality which is unmanifest, which is without qualities, which is formless has to become manifest, it has to do so by becoming 'beauty', with qualities and form. The Brahman which is one and indivisible appears to the mind as truth and appears to the emotions as beauty. A person who possesses the power of intelligence and emotion cannot experience the confluence of the truth, beauty, and reality in its entirety, but he can experience one of those powers only. He can only grasp the *sat* part by activities, *chit* part by intelligence, the *bliss* part by emotions, that too temporarily and only in parts. Even then, one should understand that the ultimate truth is not a heap of *sat*, truth; *chit*, intelligence; and *ananda*, bliss. The ultimate truth is a whole and non-dual truth-intelligence-bliss. Therefore, it is impossible to grasp it in part because it is as indivisible as Brahman. Realisation of the absolute truth is the transformation of knowledge into being. It is easily achieved by 'art' because it is predominantly made up of emotions. That is why our intellectual activities end up in devotion. The soul that gets tired of the pursuit of intellectual manoeuvring will settle itself in the plane of bhakti or devotion. Such a defeat actually has to be conceded as the grand success for the struggling intellect.⁸

Kuvempu wrote a foreword to the Kannada translation of *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*

titled *Sri Ramakrishna Vachana Veda*. It is one of his best literary and spiritual offerings to Sri Ramakrishna, his chosen deity. This foreword has also been translated into English by Dr Prabhu Shankara. It reads in part as follows:

The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna is a veritable temple on one's palm, a veritable hermitage on one's palm, a veritable place of pilgrimage on one's palm. But unlike a temple or a place of pilgrimage, there is no chance of its getting polluted. Nor is there any chance of its getting dilapidated like the structure of a temple. The home that houses this Gospel will itself become a temple. The hand that holds it will be holding the very lotus feet of the Lord. The tongue on which its letters roll will be savouring nectar itself. The Gospel is the repository of bliss; it is the ocean of peace; it is the manna of divine knowledge. It is the friend that stands by you in the hour of trial; it is the Guru that at the moment of overwhelming joy counsels humility and devotion, and makes you feel that you are an offering at the Lord's feet. It is the torch that shows your way in darkness; it is the staff to lean upon while trudging on an uneven path. It is the pole star that guides you when you are lost in wilderness. It is the quintessence of the Vedas and the Upanishads. After reading it even the most ordinary literate need not feel jealous of any scholar; nor does he feel inferior to any scholar of eminence. On the other hand, he feels that by the grace of God none is more blessed than himself; he attains peace and fulfilment. He acquires the vastness of the sky, the height of the highest of mountains, and the dignity of the ocean. Never before had God incarnated in such an approachable form, nor had the voice of the Lord shaped itself into a book that could be read and understood by the most ordinary of men and women.⁹

... The title given to the present translation is *Sri Ramakrishna Vachana Veda*. Since the new christening is done by the writer of the foreword, an explanation is warranted. ... Since the Vedas that are beyond our comprehension are infinite,

the Vedas that will materialise before us are also bound to be infinite. In the light of this, where is any impropriety in calling the rich compendium of the utterances of Sri Ramakrishna, a man of perfection, a rishi, and a great incarnation, the Veda? Incidentally, this Veda accomplishes what the old Vedas have failed to achieve—namely penetrating such hovels, which were, according to some people, beneath their dignity to enter. This *Vachana Veda* will emancipate the common masses immersed in superstition from the confines fabricated by the priestly class. This *Vachana Veda* will free them from the shackles of religious slavery, rid them of their inferiority complex, and illumine their minds. It will ultimately lead us all to spiritual liberation (17).

Sri Ramakrishna Vachana Veda will form a religious constitution, a companion to our political constitution! About quarter of a century ago, one evening, the present writer had the unique opportunity of meeting the compiler of the *Vachana Veda*, Mahendra Nath Gupta, in the company of Swami Siddheswarananda at the former's residence in Kolkata. 'M' got me to recite a poem of mine composed in Kannada on Sri Ramakrishna. Delighted by listening to it, with much affection he asked me to get it translated into Bengali and send it to him. I had promised to do so but did not do that in time. In the meanwhile 'M' had discarded his mortal coils. I now seek to keep up the promise by offering that prayerful poem as an invocation to the Kannada translation of his unique work—*Kathamrita*. May the principle of harmony and integral vision of Sri Ramakrishna, the embodiment of harmony of religions invoked in this poem lead us to spiritual fulfilment.

When the blue firmament of India
was veiled in darkness,
When our countrymen had forgotten
their goal of life
and were immersed in slumber deep,
O, Paramahansa you appeared on the horizon
like the rising sun. All paths lead to the same
mansion divine—

Thus you discerned through yogas supreme
and preached to the human kind
That no distinction exists among
the creeds of the Muslims,
and of Hindus or of Buddhists
For they are one and the same—
thus did you preach.
To those who were walking in the pathless
darkness of illusion,
You were the beacon light
that illumined their paths;
And to those who were about to be drowned
in the fierce ocean of birth and death
You have been the boat of immortality
to row them ashore.
You are like the Himalayas,
your feet firmly rooted in the earth
And your head held high in the skies,
you are the every abode of peace.
Your heart is the shoreless ocean
where afloat are the moon-like boats
of varied sects and creeds.
Christ and Mohammad, Rama and Krishna,
Zorathustra and Gautama, the Buddha
The Vedas and the Quran,
the Bible and the Talmud
Temples and Churches, Mosques, and
places of worship of fire
Kashi and Mecca have all confluenced in you!
Oh, the supreme yogi of the temple at
Dakshineswar,
One who has realised his Self and
is worshipped
by Vivekananda of universal fame,
Save the mortals by bestowing
the strength of soul on them,
And let the hearts of those
that meditate on you
become the sanctum sanctorum
where you dwell! (20–3).

Masthi Venkatesha Iyengar (1891–1986)

Masthi Venkatesha Iyengar is an icon of Kannada literature. It is he who introduced the modern style of writing small stories in Kannada. A Jnanapitha awardee, Masthi is popularly referred

as *asti*, an asset of Kannada literature. A writer with religious background and humanistic sentiments, it is but natural that he was attracted towards Sri Ramakrishna, the prophet of the modern age. He wrote a small biography of the Master in 1936 at the insistence of Swami Siddheshwarananda and Swami Ranganathananda. Swami Srivasananda helped in reading the proof. The book was published again in 1948 and in 1969 by the author himself.

Titled *Sri Ramakrishna*, the book is more than a simple biography. It analyses the achievements of the Master against the backdrop of contemporary setting. In this way, the book takes the form of an analytical understanding of the life and teachings of Sri Ramakrishna. The book begins with a short description of the life of the Master in a simple style. Then the author rationally analyses various aspects of Sri Ramakrishna's teachings. We outline some of them here: 1. The question of the existence of God. 2. The dispute regarding the form of God, with attributes and without attributes. 3. The harmony of Advaita, Vishishtadvaita, and Dvaita found in the Master's experience and teachings. 4. The need for a guru in spiritual life. 5. How to develop detachment in a householder's life. 6. Practice of karma yoga in daily life. 7. Harmony of yogas. The following extract will bring out the author's deep insight and profound understanding of Sri Ramakrishna's teachings:

The Master would create a different world altogether in each of his teachings through the depiction of wise men, ordinary mortals, aspirants, realised souls, teachers and worldly people. Its subject would be wide-ranging; its uniqueness is born out of his own experience. Also, the Master would show utmost skill in his presentation. It can be safely said that the method of spiritual teaching was transformed into a veritable art form by Sri Ramakrishna. It is said that he had developed more keenness

towards literature than mathematics in his younger days. It is because of the fact that his soul would find joy in the core of creation, *rasa*, than in its principles, *niyama*. He was a poet by birth. Hence he continued to adore Divine Mother even after the realisation of the impersonal aspect of God. As a poet, he would galvanise his teachings with a greater degree of splendour through his distinctive presentation. Explaining intricate subjects in a simple manner, narrating a story or two in order to give an insight into the subject, lacing the teachings with his characteristic humour in some instances—we found all these traits throughout his teachings. The metaphors from the lives of ordinary people would bring an inimitable beauty to his teachings. Sometimes, the Master would relate different stories in order to explain different facets of a single idea.¹⁰

Masthi Venkatesha Iyengar devotes several pages at the end of his work to point out how Sri Ramakrishna's mission found new expression and took new dimension through the personalities of Sri Sarada Devi and Swamiji. At the end, the author brings out the relevance of life and teachings of Sri Ramakrishna in the contemporary scenario. Some of the remarks made in this regard are summarised here:

We Indians give undue importance to caste distinctions. This is the cause of the glitches we find in our national psyche. We have forgotten the ancient Vedic dictum: 'Truth is one, wise men call it by different names.' It is time we realise this in the light of the life and teachings of Sri Ramakrishna. We should adopt Advaita in mystical experience; Vishishtadvaita in knowledge, and Dvaita in the practical field. The variations in religions and their customs are not obstacles to mutual respect and harmony. This has been shown by Sri Ramakrishna in this modern world. Sri Krishna says in the Gita that he has nothing to gain from his work, which is intended only for the welfare of the

whole world. Sri Ramakrishna is the living example of this statement. Throughout his life, Sri Ramakrishna upheld the ancient ideal of *brahmacharya* even among the householders. The essence of Hinduism is universalism. It has been weakened by the various factors antagonistic to this central ideal. It is our duty to hold on to his ideal. This will lead to the reshaping of Hinduism along the lines of its original ideals. Through this, Hinduism can become a beacon light to both the East and the West.

Sri Ramakrishna's life is of importance even from the mundane point of view. Christianity is losing its appeal in several nations. In India too, religion is considered a taboo by a major section of the intellectual class. The remedy to this problem can be found in Ramakrishna, who showed that the religion cannot be otherworldly. That which makes one suffer cannot be called religion. True religion is really a powerful instrument for the welfare of the world. A God who derides man can never be considered to be God. There is no harm in shunning such a concept of God. We should uphold those concepts of God which help in the overall well-being of humanity. Religion is a system which should bring auspiciousness in one's life and God is the eternal principle, which acts like a primary motivating factor to such a system.

According to Masthi Venkatesha Iyengar, this is the essence of Sri Ramakrishna's teachings.

D R Chenne Gowda

Sri D R Chenne Gowda wrote a biography of Sri Ramakrishna in the year 1939. He was a devotee of Sri Ramakrishna and an ardent admirer of the Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission. He had a close association with several eminent monks residing at Ramakrishna Math, Bangalore, including Swami Tyagishananda, the erstwhile head of Bangalore Math. His book is full of noble sentiments filled with adoration and devotion to the great master. The remarkable

incidents in the Master's life are retold in lucid poetic expressions of literary merit in this work. In one context, the author describes Sri Ramakrishna to be the embodiment of *satya*, truth and *prema*, divine love. His idea is that Sri Ramachandra represents truthfulness and Sri Krishna represents love or compassion towards humanity. The term 'Ramakrishna' is not only the combination of the names of those two great incarnations, but also represents a perfect blending and harmony of two great ideals of *satya* and *prema* represented in their lives.

The lives of Sri Sarada Devi, Swamiji, and other monastic as well as the lay disciples of Sri Ramakrishna are interwoven with the life of Sri Ramakrishna. Hence, the author describes the lives of Sri Sarada Devi and Swamiji in detail and also gives glimpses of the Master's conversations with some of the important personalities and devotees as found in *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*.

The author wholeheartedly proclaims that Sri Ramakrishna is an incarnation of God born to assuage the sufferings of the whole humanity. The following extract validates this point:

We find more suffering than happiness in this world, the abode of karma or work. Here ignorance is more predominant than knowledge; poverty is more widespread than wealth; hatred is more intense than love. Man is filled with various types of worldly desires and they in turn are making him deviate from the right path. In such adverse circumstances, Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa shines with the brilliance equal to a million suns revitalising the whole humanity. His spiritual splendour is unbroken; his catholic insight is infinitely expansive like the sky; also, he is endowed with exemplary even-sightedness like the Sun-god. He is a treasure house of divine qualities like the ocean, a repository of invaluable gems. He has a compassionate attitude towards all religious traditions. His truthful words form the nectar divine and are dear to everyone's heart. Sri Ramakrishna

bestowed his merciful blessings on all those suffering souls, who approached him for peace and solace and they ultimately found fulfilment in their lives. He did not hide anything that would be beneficial to the world. His whole life-energy was spent in redeeming and blessing humanity. Sri Ramakrishna did not have anything to gain from the outside world as he was a spiritually fulfilled soul, the manifestation of supreme Reality. He incarnated in this world out of infinite mercy in order to enthuse life-giving consciousness into the suffering humanity.¹¹

The last portion of the book contains glowing tributes to Sri Ramakrishna offered by some of his direct disciples and other great personalities.

Dattatreya Ramachandra Bendre (1896–1981)

D R Bendre popularly known as Da Ra Bendre in Karnataka, was one of the greatest poets Kannada literature has ever produced. He was mainly a mystic poet, deeply influenced by Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. He was awarded with the Jnanapith award for his collection of poems titled *Naku Tanti*. Graceful rhythm, playing with words, folklore style and deep social, spiritual and psychological undertones are some of the hallmarks of this noble poet. Bendre was also a good essayist and a literary critic of merit. His collection of essays was published in 1945 titled *Vicharamanjari*. It contains essays on varied topics like the ancient history of Karnataka, importance of Kannada language and literature, religion and its values, the true nature of mysticism, contemplation on Sri Ramakrishna, and so on.

D R Bendre devotes two essays of this book to Sri Ramakrishna. The first essay is called 'Sri Ramakrishna Manana' or 'Contemplation on Sri Ramakrishna'. The very first sentence of this section makes a fascinating reading: 'The new era which commenced with the birth of

Sri Ramakrishna created continuous ripples arising out of the descent of *atma-ganga*.' The word *atma-ganga* is very significant here, as it denotes infinite repository of divine consciousness, a metaphor the celebrated poet uses to indicate none other than Sri Ramakrishna himself. Bendre recognised five other spiritual streams other than that of Sri Ramakrishna which have influenced countless people irrespective of caste, creed, and race, quenching spiritual thirst by bringing fulfilment in their lives. The origins of such spiritual streams include great luminaries like Rabindranath Tagore, Mahatma Gandhi, Sri Aurobindo, Ramana Maharshi, and J Krishnamurthy. The author further says: 'The activities of the Ramakrishna Mission spearheaded by Swami Vivekananda have spread throughout the globe like the world-map itself. ... Sri Ramakrishna incarnated in order to manifest the true nature of all religious creeds. The true religion that Sri Ramakrishna stands for, signifies transformation of man into divine. Religion is a matter of mystic experience while a caste or creed is limited to the intellect of a person. ... The galaxy of spiritual teachers originating from Sri Ramakrishna is very much eager to transmute the whole world consisting of the entire humanity into one single community.'¹²

According to D R Bendre, Sri Ramakrishna and Swamiji belong to the fraternity of enlightened spiritual souls attached to the ancient tradition of great sages like Nara and Narayana. Through them, the life-giving message of India is calling upon the entire world not to lead the life of an animal but heed to the call of inner consciousness in order to become divine. The electrifying message of Sri Ramakrishna and Swamiji is reverberating in each and every part of our motherland like radio waves creating a sonorous rhythm of spiritual awakening in the heart of millions of people. Sri Ramakrishna is

an *atma-shilpi*, a spiritual sculptor of merit, who has descended on this earth in order to form a universal family, a universal religion and a heavenly abode on earth. Great men of such calibre are really rare indeed. Such men have the capacity to purify everything they come across. Hearing about their lives and contemplating and meditating on them, one is emancipated from earthly existence. May the divine nectar of Sri Ramakrishna's personality lead the whole humanity into eternal wisdom and make it resonate with the clarion call of life truly blissful. These are some of the insights on Sri Ramakrishna that Bendre exhibits in his essay.

The second essay is simply called 'Sri Ramakrishna'. It is an analytical yet reverential study of Sri Ramakrishna's life. The author uses simple sentences and metaphors to bring out the greatness of the Master's life. Sri Ramakrishna is compared here to modern Manu, who commenced a new era of spiritual awakening. The Master, according to Bendre, is a *grihastha-sadhu*, a householder and a monk in one, who exhibited extraordinary calibre under the guise of a simple but guileless life. Bendre's thoughts in this essay can be summarised as follows:

Devendranath Tagore, who had attained the title of *maharishi*, Ishvarchandra, who was well known as *vidyasagar*, and Bankim Chandra, who was called the greatest *acharya* of modern Bengali literature—none of these noteworthy personalities could fathom the glory of *brahma-vidya* evidently found in Sri Ramakrishna. It is the excellence of his spiritual character that was the bedrock of Sri Ramakrishna's teachings. Swamiji is the resultant fruit of his life-tree. But for Swamiji, Sri Ramakrishna's name would not have found place among the incarnations of the world. In that case, he would have been recognised just as one among the countless of saints that India in general and Bengal in particular have produced.

Sri Ramakrishna's life is extraordinary. It is evident from the manifestation of his divine character emanating in several instances. His life is really wonderful because of this supra-human character, which manifested time and again in his life. It is really rare to find such a noble householder, who was entirely devoted to spirituality. The life of Sri Ramakrishna is completely interwoven with spirituality. This exemplary life identified itself with various spiritual paths belonging to different religions and sects. Sri Ramakrishna is unique in every sense of the term. Hence, his life is not only to be studied but also to be contemplated in right earnest.

The power of incarnations is profound. Sri Ramakrishna can be compared to the Sun-god. The Sun-god makes fruits mature in time, according to the strength and innate nature of each plant. In the same manner, Sri Ramakrishna would inspire the aspirants onto the spiritual journey according to their capability. He wished each one to carve his own path in life depending upon his own earnestness in spiritual matters. He had the infinite compassion like that of a mother. He would inspire a spiritual seeker and bring him under the fold of his eternal motherly protection.

Sri Ramakrishna was an ardent devotee of Mother Kali. He did nothing on his own but solely depended upon the wish of the divine mother. The Master did not have any trace of ego. He had installed Mother Kali in the place of his ego. In this way he had become a mere instrument in the hands of the Divine Mother.

It is true that D R Bendre did not write extensively on Sri Ramakrishna. Yet, as we have seen above, his unflinching devotion to the Master and his thorough understanding of the uniqueness of his incarnation has few parallels in the literary field of Karnataka.

K Shivaram Karanth (1902–97)

Shivaram Karanth is another recipient of the Jnanpith award, who wrote on Sri Ramakrishna.

Karant was a multifaceted personality with varied interests. He had done exemplary work in almost all the fields of literature. He made much contribution to the folk dance-drama called Yakshagana. He wrote books even on specialised subjects like arts, sculpture, and science. He is also well-known for his children's books. He was a good organiser of cultural festivals both for adults and children. He had travelled extensively across the globe. However, his remarkable talent is found in his novels, which have social and rational content. He got his Jnanpith award for his novel *Mookajjiya Kanasugalu, Dreams of A Silent Granny*. Karant used to call himself an agnostic but he was deeply sympathetic and sensitive towards people around him and their lives. He had understood the importance religion plays in their lives. This has been reflected artistically in his novels. Hence, he was one of the very popular novelists in Kannada literature. Shivaram Karant translated into Kannada the English book *The Life of Sri Ramakrishna*, with a foreword from Mahatma Gandhi, first published by Advaita Ashrama, Mayavati in 1924. The translated work was first published in 1953. The second edition was brought out in 1992. In his opening remarks to the second edition, Karant says that he undertook this translation work for the benefit of his mother. He opines that this book is a faithful illustration of various devotional sentiments of Sri Ramakrishna, a guileless and an honest devotee, India has ever seen. Karant also donated the proceeds from the publication of this second edition to the Ramakrishna Mission. Swami Harshananda, Adhyaksha of the Ramakrishna Math, Bengaluru, has also written a few words of appreciation.

Shivaram Karant has written thousands of pages of prose in Kannada. He is a master of Kannada prose. Hence, his translation is very lucid and readable. He has maintained the amicable

style here also, for which he is famous throughout Karnataka. This book reads like an original piece of literature. The incidents in Master's life have been faithfully and graphically rendered into chaste Kannada language. One particular speciality is that he translates the word 'Master' as 'Acharya', a quite appropriate term indeed!

Swami Pranaveshananda (d. 1963)

Swami Pranaveshananda was a monk of the Ramakrishna Order. He made a successful maiden attempt to translate and publish all the parts of *Sri Ramakrishna Lila Prasanga*, the first part of which was published in 1955. The second edition, was brought out in parts in 1962 and 1963. It is a translation directly made from the original Bengali. The distinct feature of this book is that a verbatim and accurate rendering of the original Bengali into Kannada is attempted here. The translator says in his foreword that he has retained many Bengali words in the Kannada translation as he feels one can adopt them in Kannada also without compromising their literary purity and charm. He further remarks that there is much similarity between Bengali and Kannada as far as their literary styles are concerned. Swami Pranaveshananda says that his translation closely follows the original and he has adopted this style on the advice of the scholars of the day. He confesses that he could have done a more concise and readable translation but he preferred an elaborate one because his intention was to render it fully faithful to the original. Swami Pravaneshananda took the help of several scholars in editing the text. The prominent among them is Kadangodlu Shankar Bhat of Mangaluru, a luminary in the Kannada literary circle. The significance of Sri Ramakrishna's life expounded in *Sri Ramakrishna Lila Prasanga* is devotionally brought out by the translator in his foreword as follows:

Every page of this work comprises divine knowledge and inspiring events. The intention of spiritual teachings is to facilitate an earnest spiritual seeker to achieve fulfilment here and hereafter. Hence, an aspirant would immensely benefit from moulding his life on the lines of Sri Ramakrishna, the spiritual ideal for the present age. He would attain spiritual fulfilment and receive intimate assurance of everlasting bliss that would make his present life really worthwhile. This book may be construed to be an encyclopaedia of all the systematic spiritual practices, all the modes of concerted contemplation and all kinds of spiritual ideals and hence, a guiding light for all the faithful seekers of truth and an instrument which fetches eternal peace and contentment to a soul, suffering from the shackles of samsara, the state of ignorance and bondage.¹³

K Channabasappa

K Channabasappa is a legal luminary of Karnataka popularly known as Ko Che. He served as an advocate and then as a judge in different places. However, he is well-known for his vast and varied literary works both fiction and non-fiction. He is a great admirer of Sri Ramakrishna and Swamiji. He published a translation of Sri Ramakrishna's parables in 1957. It is based on the collections of stories and parables brought by Ramakrishna Math, Chennai. The interesting part of this book is the inclusion of an essay by K V Puttappa or Kuvempu titled 'The Method of Parables' as the foreword. In this essay, Kuvempu brilliantly analyses the method of similes or comparisons found in the parables of Sri Ramakrishna. He says it is a distinct method that the incarnations adopted to elucidate abstract points into something tangible and simple, which could be understood by all, the layperson and the learned. This method has a noble intention to make eternal truths enshrined in the scriptures to be known to all strata of society

irrespective of caste, creed, and race. Kuvempu says that one cannot grasp the transcendental aspect of truth as it is beyond the pale of mundane understanding. Hence, it is imperative that one should try to get glimpses of reality through similes and analogies. Through this, one can feel the touch of abstract truth and can understand the magnitude of the transcendental reality even in the state of normal existence. Kuvempu calls this method *pratima vidhana*, the method of representative symbols. This is what comprises the uniqueness of Sri Ramakrishna's teachings. He remarks that such a symbology can be observed all through Sri Ramakrishna's life in every event. Sri Ramakrishna used other methods also like illustrations, examples, and comparisons to bring home some intricate points. *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* written by Mahendra Nath Gupa is a treasure house of such analogies. Kuvempu wonders that perhaps not even a single page out of the more than a thousand pages of the *Gospel* is devoid of this distinctiveness.¹⁴

Swami Somanathananda (d. 1997)

Swami Somanathananda was the head of Ramakrishna Ashrama, Mysore for more than two decades. It was he who spearheaded the publication work of the Ramakrishna Order in Kannada by diligently bringing out books on Sri Ramakrishna, Sri Sarada Devi, and Swamiji, scriptures, and other allied literature. He was a prolific writer and good orator. He travelled across Karnataka spreading the message of Sri Ramakrishna through speeches and distribution of Ramakrishna-Vivekananda literature. Thanks to his prodigious efforts, the message of Sri Ramakrishna has reached every nook and corner of Karnataka.

Swami Somanathananda wrote a biography of Sri Ramakrishna titled *Gurudeva Sri Ramakrishna* in 1972. Apart from this, he had also

written a medium-sized and short biography of the Master for wider circulation. His writing style is very simple and conversational. He uses simple sentences, and words and idioms of common usage in order to explain even an intricate topic. We find no artificiality or ornamentation in his style. He uses very simple analogies of daily life of a common person, which makes his writing charming and highly readable. Swami Somanathananda had deep insight into the significance of the life and message of Sri Ramakrishna and he tried his best to make it known to every strata of society through his books.

The prologue of his book *Gurudeva Sri Ramakrishna* contains some delectable sentences on the importance of Sri Ramakrishna's personality, a portion of which is translated below:

Swami Vivekananda, while speaking on Sri Ramakrishna, says his Master's life is a living commentary on Veda and Vedanta. His life itself is the essence of all the scriptures, of all the religions and of all the philosophies. He did not come to this earth to rejuvenate any particular religion. A person increases faith in one's own religion by reading the Master's life. Also, he develops respect towards followers of other religions also. In the Vedic age, the Upanishadic sages declared that the truth is one and wise men call it by different names. Sri Ramakrishna, who was born in the middle of the last century, found out through his spiritual striving, that all religions are but different paths leading to the same supreme truth. His life itself is a spiritual laboratory. He did not read different scriptures. He practised the essence of the scriptures and experienced the truth. His words are not words of a scholar but words of a mystic. He has directly experienced truth. Hence, his words contain beauty and strength of that truth. A lamp burns nourished by the oil. In the same manner, the oil of God-realisation gives sustenance to Sri Ramakrishna's words. That is why his words are so much simple. Even children can understand

the intricate philosophy of Vedanta. He speaks in such a manner. This is an art, all cannot have. This is an innate capacity, a few possess. Sri Ramakrishna's words are so simple that they are also attractive and charming. We feel surprised and thrilled on observing that one single individual can practise so much spiritual practice in his life. He takes up one spiritual practice after another and attains its goal dedicating all his energies. The truth is realised through this type of spiritual striving. He achieves in a few days, what a normal man takes years to accomplish engaging in sadhana. Hence, Sri Ramakrishna is not an ordinary mortal. He is *parama purusha*, great personality.¹⁵

Swami Somanathananda devotes the last chapter of his book to a detailed analysis of Sri Ramakrishna's personality.

Contemporary Writers

We have tried to examine in detail important contributions of Kannada writers, both lay and monastic of bygone era, in disseminating Sri Ramakrishna's message throughout Karnataka. Continuing this glorious tradition, many contemporary writers have also immensely enriched literature on Sri Ramakrishna in Kannada. A brief description of notable writers among them and their literary achievements is attempted here.

Swami Harshananda • Swami Harshananda, presently Adhyaksha of Ramakrishna Math, Bangalore is well-known for his mastery over Sanskrit language and vast erudition on matters concerning Hindu religion and culture. He has composed *Sri Ramakrishna Suprabhatam* in Sanskrit. He has written a short biography of Sri Ramakrishna in Sanskrit and translated *Sri Ramakrishna Karnamritam* by Ottur Balabhatta into Kannada. He has also written numerous essays on Sri Ramakrishna's life, achievements, and significance, which have come out both in

English and Kannada in the form of booklets. The book on Sri Ramakrishna's philosophy is one of them. Translated into Kannada as *Sri Ramakrishna Vedanta Darshana*, this gives a clear understanding of Sri Ramakrishna's views on abstract philosophical terms like Brahman, maya, creation, Ishvara or personal God, Atman, bondage, emancipation, jnana, and bhakti. Harshananda has successfully condensed philosophical viewpoints of Sri Ramakrishna found in his conversations and has methodically presented them before the readers. Swami Harshananda's vast knowledge of scriptures and his penchant for systematic thinking and analysis are evident in this essay.

Swami Purushottamananda • Swami Purushottamananda was instrumental in spreading the message of the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda ideology across Karnataka, especially northern Karnataka. He was a gifted singer, a charming speaker, and an able organiser. He travelled widely and through his bhajans and discourses brought spiritual solace to thousands of people throughout Karnataka. He was also a very talented writer. He wrote a biography of Sri Ramakrishna titled *Yugavatara Sri Ramakrishna*, which was published in three volumes in 1989. Through his highly readable style and amicable explanations and analyses, Swami Purushottamananda touched the heart of all, scholars and laymen alike. The purpose of writing this book has been spelt out by the author himself in his foreword: 'The intention is to portray the life of Sri Ramakrishna in such a way that, it can be easily and clearly visualised even by common people. This book will serve the purpose of helping people to brighten their lives with the perennial spiritual light, that is, Sri Ramakrishna.'¹⁶ We can safely say that Swami Purushottamananda has achieved this noble purpose through this book.

Swami Raghaveshananda • Swami Raghaveshananda is the head of Ramakrishna Math, Ooty, Tamil Nadu. He is well-known for a number of books, which have become very popular all over Karnataka. He is a prolific writer, a good orator, and an able administrator. He has written a unique book called *Krishna Sandesha-Ramakrishna Upadesha*, wherein he has collected appropriate sayings of Sri Ramakrishna for almost all verses of the Bhagavadgita. It is an innovative way of popularising Sri Ramakrishna's teachings to one and all. Swami Raghaveshananda has also written another interesting book called *Banni, Sri Ramakrishna Bagge Kelona, Come, Let Us Hear About Sri Ramakrishna*. Prabhu Shankara has written a book on Sri Basaveshwara. It contains imaginative reminiscences on Sri Basavaeshwara by his contemporaries. Swami Raghaveshananda has adopted the same style in this book but the narrations here are taken from authentic sources. The disciples and followers of Sri Ramakrishna tell about the greatness of their Master, in an imaginative and creative conversational style. It is another innovative way that Raghaveshananda adopted to spread the message of Sri Ramakrishna among the Kannada knowing people.

Swami Nityasthananda • Swami Nityasthananda is a scholarly monk specialising in Western philosophy and psychology and Hindu scriptures. He headed the publication department of Sri Ramakrishna Ashrama, Mysore for several years. During this period, he brought out many books of importance. Later he became the first-ever editor of *Viveka Prabha*, official Kannada monthly magazine of the Ramakrishna Order. He also served as the Adhyaksha of the Mysore Ashrama. As we have already mentioned, he prepared a new translation of *Sri Ramakrishna Lila Prasanga*, which was published in two volumes in 1994. It is a highly readable adaptation of the

original. The complicated philosophical discussions in the original have been rendered in a simplified language and hence this book is much accessible to common readers. As an editor of the *Viveka Prabha*, Swami Nityasthanadaji has written a number of editorials centred on Sri Ramakrishna. A series of three editorials titled 'Three Facets of the Incarnation of Sri Ramakrishna' stands out among them.¹⁷ The contention of the author is that we have to study the theme of the incarnation of Sri Ramakrishna in a larger perspective. He says that the personalities of Sri Sarada Devi and Swamiji also come under its purview. We cannot differentiate them from the personality of Sri Ramakrishna. The incarnation of the Lord in the present age, in fact, has three facets—Sri Ramakrishna, Sri Sarada Devi, and Swamiji. Swami Nityasthananda's deep insight and thorough grasp of the significance of Sri Ramakrishna, Sri Sarada Devi, and Swamiji are evident here.

S Venkatachalapati • The name of S Venkatachalapati is not well-known in Kannada literary circles. However, his translation of Christopher Isherhood's *Ramakrishna and His Disciples* is an important book. It was published by the publication department of the Mysore University in 1973. In his foreword to this book, the translator gives a short autobiographical description of how this book helped him to overcome the turbulent circumstances in his life. The translation is lucid and readable, but written in old style. Swami Achalananda, a disciple of Swami Yatiswarananda, and Dr Prabhu Shankara had read the proofs and encouraged the translator. Venkatachalapati has also translated a Sanskrit book titled *Sri Ramakrishna Paramahamsiyam*, a poetic work composed by Sridhara Bhaskara Varnekar. It is more than a translation as pointed out by the celebrated Sanskrit scholar N Ranganatha Sharma in his

foreword. Venkatachalapati has tried to explain the idioms and sentiments of the original with his own ideas making his rendering refreshing and innovative.

G S Shivarudrappa • G S Shivarudrappa is one of the celebrated Kannada poets. He has been conferred the epithet of 'National Poet' by the government of Karnataka. As a budding poet, he translated songs of *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, which is really a remarkable achievement by any standard. One cannot make out his compositions to be translations as they have retained original charm and rhythm. The words that the poet has used for translation are profound and highly mystical in nature, yet simple and comprehensible even by common persons. Many of the poems that G S Shivarudrappa has translated, have been set to music and are sung by devout monks and devotees during bhajan sessions in Karnataka. As far as the Kannada language is concerned, these songs have become an inseparable part of a great tradition of devotional songs composed by a number of saints, belonging to both Shaiva and Vaishnava traditions, since several centuries. G S Shivarudrappa has also composed several poems in praise of the Sri Ramakrishna, Sri Sarada Devi, and Swamiji. In one of his poems, he refers to Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi as '*Ramakrishna taposurya kiranabimba chandrike*; the moon, which reflects the rays of Sri Ramakrishna, the blazing sun of austerity'—a beautiful poetic expression indeed!

Prabhu Shankara • Prabhu Shankara was closely associated with the monks of the Ramakrishna Mission for more than six decades. He was also a distinguished prose writer, literary critic, dramatist, and a poet. His contribution in the preparation of Kannada version of *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* is significant. He has written a long foreword to the latest

revised edition of *Sri Ramakrishna Lila Prasanga*, translated by Swami Nityasthananda, which itself is a work of great merit. It is akin in literary value to the celebrated foreword his teacher and mentor Kuvempu had written to the translation of *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* decades ago. In his foreword, Prabhu Shankara substantiates the point that Sri Ramakrishna's life is a wondrous phenomenon in the spiritual history of the world. He also points out that Sri Ramakrishna not only invigorated the religio-spiritual scenario of the whole world, but also emphasised social and humanistic aspects of true religion. Prabhu Shankara stresses more on the humane aspect of Sri Ramakrishna because he believes that it is the gentle compassion of the Master for suffering humanity that really distinguishes him from other saints and incarnations.

C P Krishna Kumar • C P Krishna Kumar is popularly known as CPK in the literary field of Karnataka. He is a senior Kannada laureate, very much devoted to Sri Ramakrishna. In 1984, he wrote a small book containing the life stories of Sri Ramakrishna, Sri Sarada Devi, and Swamiji called *Ratna-traya, The Triad of Gems*. C P Krishna Kumar writes small sentences, which seem like small aphorisms. Utmost brevity, depth of meaning, and sentiment are the unique features of his writing. He brings about the significance of the life and teachings of Sri Ramakrishna, Sri Sarada Devi, and Swamiji in a small paragraph in his preamble: 'The life and teachings of these three gems are relevant even today; They don't have mere sentiments; there is rational view, there is scientific mentality. They are required not only for spiritual aspirants but also for those who are interested in secular prosperity. Really, what is needed is the integrating balance between the spiritual and the scientific. The sole aim of life and teachings

of the holy trio is *Sarvodaya*, the welfare of one and all; hence they are to be received by one and all.'¹⁸


T B Basavaraju • T B Basavaraju presented his doctoral thesis on the topic, 'Sri Ramakrishna's Contribution to Universal Religion' to Mysore University, which was eventually accepted and the doctorate degree was granted. The thesis was published in 1992. A philosophical work, this thesis traces the significant milestones in Sri Ramakrishna's life before attempting a serious exposition of three important themes: 1. 'Dharma' according to Sri Ramakrishna. 2. The ways to self-realisation. 3. Sri Ramakrishna's philosophical thinking. The author enumerates basic traditional concepts in each topic as preamble to Sri Ramakrishna's contribution to them. There is an interesting discussion on whether Sri Ramakrishna is a devotee or a *jnani*. It concludes with Sri Ramakrishna's doctrine that there is no difference between true devotion and true knowledge.

Importance of Viveka Prabha Magazine

Sri Ramakrishna Ashrama, Mysore is bringing out a monthly magazine called *Viveka Prabha* from January 2000 onwards. It has become a widespread and powerful medium to spread the message of Sri Ramakrishna in Karnataka. Many authors, monastic as well as lay, have written extensively on Sri Ramakrishna's life and message in this magazine. Also, the magazine has brought out two special issues, one exclusively on Sri Ramakrishna's life and another on his teachings. Several monks and nuns belonging to the Ramakrishna tradition like Swami Jagadatmananda, Swami Raghaveshananda, Swami Anupamananda, Swami Karunakarananda, Swami Shivakantananda, Pravrajika Paramaprana, Pravrajika Dharma-prana of Sri Sarada Math, Mata Tyagamayi,

and others have contributed several articles on Sri Ramakrishna. Also, several senior writers like Ramachandraswamy, H N Muralidhara, Prabhu Prasad, K Anantaramu, Prasannakshi, and G S Jayadev have written extensively on Sri Ramakrishna in *Viveka Prabha*. Hence, the publication of *Viveka Prabha* is an important milestone in the history of literature on Sri Ramakrishna in Kannada literature.

Conclusion

Sri Ramakrishna predicted that his photo 'will be worshipped in many homes as time goes on'.¹⁹ This prophecy has become true through the wide acceptance of Sri Ramakrishna as the incarnation by millions of people all over the world. Karnataka is no exception to this global phenomenon. Sri Ramakrishna and his invigorating message of divine love and universal harmony have become an inseparable constituent of the rich culture and tradition of Karnataka for more than a century. The literary contributions on Sri Ramakrishna in the Kannada language are immense and poignant. May Sri Ramakrishna bless this land and the people, ever committed and devoted to his cause of universal brotherhood and religious harmony throughout history! 

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Forms of Spiritual Practice

Swami Pavitrananda

There is nothing so blessed as a devout religious, nothing so miserable as a religious without devotion. Since you cannot be in real solitude, be in mental solitude. Religious Orders are not formed for the purpose of gathering together perfect people, but those who have the courage to aim at perfection. When God calls anyone to be a religious, God binds himself to bestow on that person all that is needed for perfection in his vocation. We must not think that in entering Religion one becomes perfect all of a sudden, but that one enters there to tend to perfection. The religious life is not natural life; it is above nature, and its soul is given to and formed by grace. It is God, and not the cell, that we must choose for our dwelling place. The Religious who has begun well has not done all, unless he perseveres even to the end.¹

DURING MY STUDENT LIFE, while I was a boy, I had a friend, a senior friend as he was several years older, whom I respected. Sometimes I took the liberty of teasing him, if there was any opportunity. He was

talking one time, about an interest he had in a reformist movement among the Hindus. I told him, 'What is there of religion in them? Some people gather together like a club to discuss things, with this advantage, they do not drink.' In India, you know, drinking is considered bad.

Sometimes I would feel sorry that I had used such strong words, but is it not a fact? Sometimes we think that if we gather together and talk of ethical things that is enough as far as religion is concerned. But religion is not simply a method of learning ethical virtues, or talking philosophy. Religion is a method of realisation. If you cannot go so far, if you do not have perfect realisation, it is a method for endeavour towards realisation. As such, it is a matter of practice and mere intellectual discussion does not help real religion. Rather, it is a matter of practice by which you change your personality, and it is indicated by a transformation of your personality. Naturally, it is a slow process, and one has to be patient. But any organic growth is a slow process,

and you cannot expect to get magic results, to be transformed overnight.

When you direct a big boat, it takes time to change its direction. You do not know that the boat of your life is much more heavily loaded than any earthly boat. It is a much bigger thing in this tiny human form, for it carries with it the load of inherited tendencies of many, many lives. It is a very big boat, and it requires a slow process to change its direction.

In India, there is a belief in certain quarters that if you bathe in the sacred Ganga River, you will wash all your sins away. It seems it is a quick process; you have found a formula by means of which you can commit any amount of sin, and if you take care to have a bath in the Ganga, you are free.

There is a Bengali poem parody:

Well, Mother Ganga, as long as you are there,
What do I care?
I can commit any amount of sin, any crime.
Nothing can touch me.
I will have a bath in the Ganga,
And everything will be all right.

Sri Ramakrishna had a great belief in the Ganga, but he said: 'Unless you have spiritual practice, unless the ground is ready, yes, you may go to the Ganga and take a plunge. You may wash yourself of all your sins, but the sins are sitting on a tree. When you come under that tree, all your past inherited tendencies will come and seize you again.' You cannot escape so easily.

You may have a momentary impulse of religion and think that you have done a great deal. No. The sins are there in the tree, all the burden of your inherited tendencies, the momentum of the desires of your past lives, and they will fall on you. You will have to carry that load.

So there are various forms of spiritual practice, but at the outset there will come a difficulty for the common man. When you talk of religion, naturally there comes the thought of God,

whatever might be the nature of God. How can we believe in God, whom we have not seen, who is altogether an unknown factor in our life? That is the difficulty. The average man will say: 'How can I believe all those things that are said in the scriptures. What is the proof that there is God? How can we plunge into an unknown sea about which we are not sure?'

I do not deny that many persons think that way, nor do I blame them, but so long as one thinks that way, real religious yearning has not dawned on him. Real religious yearning dawns when you have had experience of this world. Not that a person gets experience necessarily because he has become old, for some persons do not have real experience when they become old, while others are experienced even while they are young. They have a sensitive imagination just to look at things, to see what is the nature of this world.

Some persons get experience through hard knocks and bitter experiences. They find that here there is nothing, and they try to find out something more, something which is more reliable and real. In that way comes real religious yearning; it is a matter of experience.

If a person says that he does not believe in God, 'What's the use of going after a will o' the wisp', we need not quarrel with him. By quarrelling, you cannot force your ideas upon a person. Be patient; let him have experience, and then he will come. I am sure he will come; I am sure there will come in him a real longing to know, 'Where is the perfect refuge in life? Where is shelter?'

And then comes another factor, when religious yearning has just dawned on a person. What is the nature of God? There are so many opinions about the nature of God and about religious pursuits, and there is so much bigotry and fanaticism. One school of thought will say, 'We are right', and they will criticise others, 'They are wrong'. There is confusion!

Well, fanaticism arises when you have a weak point, when you are in ignorance, when you, yourself, are groping in darkness. Ignorance is the source of all fanaticism and bigotry. In arguments, when you do not know a thing, when you are not sure of your position, you easily become irritated and excited. But a person who knows his position is always calm and quiet, because he is sure of himself. So, as long as people are groping in darkness, there will be this confusion, arguments, fanaticism, bigotry, and irreligion in the name of religion.

For those persons who have known the Truth can bear with all sorts of arguments. They know what is right. Such persons know that, after all, all people are in the same march, although they do not know what they are doing. A man of spiritual wisdom will know that they are coming in the path, only there is some hubbub while in that march. When they go further, they will understand what it is. So don't worry about this confusion, for all fanaticism, all bigotry simply comes from ignorance.

What is the nature of God? If one thinks for one's self, naturally they will think in terms of philosophical discussion. They will think, 'God is impersonal. God cannot be felt or seen. God is not like us human beings, or anything which we see with our eyes. God is impersonal.' They stand on the intellectual level, and cannot believe that God is personal.

There can be no objection if they stand on an intellectual level and pursue their own process of spiritual life, but there is a great deal of intellectual snobbery in it. They think they are right, that God is impersonal, and they look askance at those who think of God as a personal Being, and follow other forms of spiritual practice. Sometimes they attack others, and if they do not do that, there is a little intellectual snobbery in them. 'We are better. We have an intellectual

outlook. We cannot think of God in terms of personal Being. God is impersonal.'

Even in India, in Vedanta, which speaks of God as an impersonal Entity, as Brahman or ultimate Reality, without form, without attributes, those who pursue spiritual practice to realise that Ideal have some spiritual qualifications which are absent in most people. That path can be pursued only by those who have not inherited much burden from their past lives. They are pure by nature. They have done a great deal in their past lives, and so they are fit for that particular way of spiritual pursuit. Not those persons who simply talk intellectually and philosophically, 'God's nature is "this and that", and what's the use of doing "this and that"', as if those who do so belong to an inferior level.

On one occasion in India, a religious preacher belonging to a reformist school asked one of our swamis, 'You people,' he said, 'who have got education and know modern thought, why do you pursue all these forms of spiritual practice? These are all for ignorant people.'

And that swami said, 'We are all ignorant.'

You are not wiser simply because you have read some books. You are all ignorant as far as spiritual things are concerned. Those books have no value as a spiritual barometer. You have not risen high simply by having mastered so many books philosophically. I would not have objection if there were no danger. But because of their intellectual pride and conceit, many keep God away from themselves. It gives a little intellectual joy, a little intellectual excitement, and no more than that. They close their eyes, and sit together and discuss, no better than a club where high things are discussed, at least for most people.

And another thing, when you go on the intellectual level alone, it is nothing but armchair politics, armchair religion, armchair spirituality. That cannot stand the trials and temptations of life; however much you discuss intellectually the

nature of God, it does not help you, unless you practise seriously and deeply when trials of life come, and they are bound to come.

And even when you think intellectually and think that it is spiritual practice, what do you do? Suppose you think of God as an impersonal Entity; if you close your eyes, what do you think? At best, you will be thinking of space, infinite space, and even then you have no idea what infinity is. Or you will think of God as light, as love, as life, as purity, and so on. What is this? God is light. What will you think? What do you mean by light? Is it like an electric light in your room? You will think of some light; you will think of some human love, some human feeling. And as soon as you think of human feelings, or even light, you will forget that you think in terms of symbols. You feel, in your pride, that you are thinking of the impersonal God, but when you think of God

as light, God as infinity, God as love, at once you think in terms of symbols. You do exactly what others are doing only you think that you are superior. And you are pursuing a path for which you are not fit. There are persons who are fit, but not most of those persons who think in that way.

We all think in terms of symbols, because we are simply symbols. Each man is a symbol of certain ideas; he is here on this earth to fulfil certain ideas in this life. When these ideas are fulfilled, his life is finished, and he takes up another life. So we, ourselves, are symbols of certain ideas.

When you think of God, also, whom you worship God, you must use certain forms which are called symbols. All religious worship makes use of certain symbols. Some religious persons will think, 'No. These are not symbols. That is idolatry.' But they forget they are doing the same thing, only unknowingly, and not in a systematic



IMAGE: ANGSHU

way. Since we cannot think, except in terms of symbols, let us do it systematically.

Why, our very language, is a collection of symbols. What is a word? What is our language? It is simply a word symbol. There is a thing, and we use a certain word which is the word symbol for the thing. And it is said that when you think and worship in terms of symbols, and there are various symbols, they are verbal symbols since you think in terms of words, word symbols, material symbol, ritual symbols. You cannot think of God excepting as a personal Being.

Those who actually think in the impersonal attitude go by a negative process, 'This is not, this is not. God is not, God is not.' They do not say positively that it is an impersonal Being. Their meditation is different; their spiritual practice is different. They are only a few persons, and even then they come at times to worship God as a personal Being; they take the help of various symbols.

As I said, you cannot think without having some symbols in your mind. So you think of God as a personal Being. And when you think God is a personal Being at once you think, 'God is our Father. God is our Mother. God is our friend.' People of different religions think in different ways. There, also, you take the help of symbols.

We knew, in our family when we were children, that father protects us, mother loves us, and we felt secure in that love. In the same way, we feel secure in the love of God, whom we consider as Mother or Father. So we take the help of these symbols; this is our feeling symbol.

Then, there is another symbol which we may call the perfection symbol. God as an absolute Being, absolute perfection, means nothing to us. It is said that gold, if it is perfectly pure, cannot be used to make any ornaments. There must be some dross in it. God, in his absolute perfection, is a bloodless, colourless Entity, and it does not help us much. We want to see how God reacts when

he is on our level. So, if we find that anyone with human form has reached perfection, we take him as a substitute for God. I will call that a perfection symbol. We find that here is a person whom we see, or if we have not seen, others like us have seen, and that person reached perfection. He becomes a substitute for God to us, for all practical purposes, and so we worship God in the form of prophets or incarnations. We cannot think of higher perfection than what we find in Christ, or in Buddha, or in any other incarnation. They are far above saints; they cannot even be called saints. They have reached such a high level of perfection that we cannot conceive of anything more perfect than what they lived in their lives.

So we worship them as symbols of God. That is a good thing; it is not a concession to human weakness. Rather, it is the height of human aspiration. We find perfection in human form, and we feel that we shall be able to reach that perfection if we follow their teachings and example. So, it is a practical thing, not simply a concession to human weakness. It is as good, perhaps better, for most of us. And what you think deeply, you become. If you think of perfection embodied in a prophet or incarnation, your life begins to change; think of perfection, and perfection you become.

So these are substitutes for God. In Vedanta we say, '*Pratika-upasana*; worship through substitutes.' There are many substitutes and you can take one which you like. As I said, some persons think of God as light, or as love, but they do not do it systematically. That is the trouble. But if you do it systematically, then you get the result.

In the Vedas, in the Upanishads, they give definite directions in a systematised way. Think of, say, *akasha*, that is space or ether, as a substitute for God. You worship and meditate on the sun as Brahman; you meditate on the air as Brahman. There is a beautiful hymn in the Upanishads: '*Tvameva pratyaksham brahmasi*; you are the direct

symbol of God.² We cannot think of anything else so infinite, so all-pervading as air. And you meditate that, 'Thou art the direct symbol of God.' Not that air is God, but it is the symbol of God, God as all-pervading. It is a form of meditation.

Sri Ramakrishna used to say: 'One can realise God through intense renunciation. But the soul must be restless for Him, as restless as one feels for a breath of air when one's head is pressed under water.'³ You see, when one has realisation, that is the symbol he could give, that he feels the touch of God as tangibly as he feels the touch of the all-pervading air.

'Thou art the symbol of God.' You meditate on that, and there is a particular process of meditation. The mind is so elusive; you think its activities are something extraordinary. There is a form of worship, to think of mind as God, mind as Brahman, or rather of mind as a substitute for Brahman, not that it is Brahman. You lower the ideal of Brahman, because of human difficulty in conception, but take mind as a substitute for Brahman and meditate on mind as Brahman. This is called *pratika*. *Pratika* means that you take a lower thing as a substitute for a higher thing, because you cannot conceive of Brahman otherwise. You do it unknowingly, but you do it systematically. So, these are all symbols of Brahman or God.

And then you come to the more concrete thing, image worship. In Hinduism there is worship of many different deities. From the outside one can criticise and say, 'What are they doing, worshipping idols? God cannot live in a temple built by human hands.'



Well, it is true, but God can live in a temple built by human minds. This temple is a temple of love and devotion and faith. What is an image? An image is a symbol concretised. Each image, each deity, whom the Hindus worship in temples, is a symbol concretised, concretised as a definite idea of God and put in a definite form.

Let us think of Shiva, since many people worship Shiva. What does it represent to Hindu minds? It is said of Shiva that he is the best of yogis. He is the symbol of renunciation. He has nothing, and he is in deep meditation.

There is a beautiful song composed by a disciple of Sri Ramakrishna, who was a playwright and a great writer.⁴ Here is Shiva the greatest of yogis, in deep meditation. Shiva's form is white, he says, as if an infinite snowy expanse. There is the snowy peak of a mountain. Think of an infinite snowy expanse, where there is no breath of air, as it were, with no other life to disturb the atmosphere. He stays there in deep meditation, alone. There is silence, the silence of the great void, before the universe came into being.

He stays there, always in the present; for him there is no past; for him there is no future. He lives only in the present because then time did not exist. He represents eternal life; he represents perfection; he represents the greatest spiritual wisdom.

That is Shiva, according to certain ideas. When we worship the image of Shiva, we worship those ideas; the Shiva form concretised those ideas. Not that we worship the idol, not that we worship the image, the clod of earth or the piece of stone. It represents certain ideas to

a Hindu mind. They will not think that it is a piece of stone, but when they go to worship, all those other ideas rush into their mind, and if they are spiritually evolved, they will forget it is a piece of stone. Then they think of Shiva, the great god who is in deep meditation; it will help them and they will also be rapt in meditation.

This is just to cite one instance. It represents certain ideas in concrete form. It is not idolatry; it is symbol worship as much as it is symbol when you think that God is light, God is love, God is purity. It is in a much more tangible form, and as such it is much more helpful.

It is said that even those religions which do not care for image worship or idolatry, even they worship taking substitutes. Let us take Islam. In Islam, the burial ground of saints is sacred to them; they worship that place. Even as a Hindu, while I was a boy, I would go to the burial ground of a Mohammedan saint and worship with milk. Because, at that time especially, Hindus were more tolerant and liberal, I would go with others, and the Mohammedans would worship the burial ground. And they do not do it knowing fully the significance, that it is substitute worship. You think that here was a saint who evolved highly in spiritual life, and you worship him even in his burial ground. I don't blame them; all that I say is that it is human nature. So long as you are a body, and this body is a symbol of certain ideas, you have to worship taking the help of symbols.

And how does this symbol worship arise? I read in the book, *Ambassador's Report* written by Chester Bowles, former American Ambassador in India, that when he went to India, he was eager to see the place where Mahatma Gandhi was cremated. When he went there, to that cremation ground, he, and his wife also, offered wreaths of flowers, and there was a photograph. Now, it is human nature. What is there in the cremation ground? Lots of people who do not

believe in religion, who do not go to temples to worship, go there and offer wreaths of flowers with great devotion. I have seen that sometimes they put coins there also, as they do in temples. I don't blame them; I say that it is human nature. Here is a great personality, whose character you like, and you worship him as idea even after he is dead, going to his cremation ground. You think of these ideas, which is a form of worship. In that way there came the forms of symbol worship through images.

But how the conception of those images came into being is difficult to find, for it was not an ordinary conception of a human mind. We could not create a language by starting a society for it, for, as I said, language is a collection of word symbols. It came out of the natural tendencies of mind. Thought expressed itself in certain words, and those words could be simply accepted by all. Otherwise, only one or two words found out by one person might be current, but even then, if they do not represent certain ideas which are common in human minds, those words will not go into language. Those words will last only for the time being. To go into the language they must represent ideas which are common to many minds.

So those images of God represent ideas which are in the mind of humanity, and those ideas come out of the deepest perception of sages and saints, not by ordinary minds. Let us see how the conception of Shiva, which I have already described, came into being. Sometimes we say, perhaps looking at the snowy expanse in the Himalayas, one can see that there is a great personality in deep meditation. As the song said, in the infinite snowy expanse there is a snow-capped mountain peak, and when there is perfect silence, you feel that there is definitely a Being in meditation. From that, perhaps, came the conception of Shiva. But it is much deeper even than

that; it came out of the deepest perception of certain saints. In their deepest meditation, this form revealed itself, and therefore it could be accepted by all spiritual aspirants.

Now, are they simply imagination? When we think of symbols, at once the question comes as to whether they are simply imagination. No. Because they came out of the deepest perception of sages and saints. They saw these things and they were real, and that form can be perceived by others, if your mind is in the same spiritual condition. And so we find a large number of saints from time immemorial who have these perceptions, who tangibly realise those forms. There is no doubt about it.

How can they do that? That is a different thing. You cannot explain it, but you do find persons having those visions, tangible visions, that transform their lives. They become saints; they go beyond the reach of human frailties. They have become saints by worshipping those ideas, by taking help of those symbols. These are the facts; you cannot deny them. How you will explain it is a different thing, but even if you cannot explain it, you cannot deny those facts.


Sri Ramakrishna started life worshipping Kali in a temple, while Swami Vivekananda would not believe in image worship in the beginning. Afterwards, he would say about image worship that if a person can become a saint like Sri Ramakrishna, he would worship an image a hundred times. These are facts. You cannot deny them. They are not simply creations of human minds. They come out of the deepest realisations of saints and sages, and therefore they were universally accepted.

But you cannot create the symbols by your own mind; ordinary persons cannot do that. It is a mistaken idea. If you take a form, any symbol, out of your own mind, you cannot pursue spiritual practice by that, nor can you get the result.

You must take these things in a systematic way from persons who have realised Truth, or you must get them from scriptures which embody the spiritual experiences of saints.

But the greatest form of worship, the greatest symbol is that God is all-pervading. God is within every human individual. It is said, 'What is this universe we see? What is this phenomenal world we see?' It is composed of name and form. Whatever you see in this universe has got a form and you give it a name. If you can separate a thing from name and form, which are, after all, human creations, what remains is Brahman, is God.

So, in each human being, if you can separate him or her from name and form, each one is Brahman, each one is God. There is a beautiful verse in one of the Upanishads: 'Thou art man, thou art woman, thou art boy and thou art girl, thou art the old man tottering on a stick, And thou pervades everything.'⁵

So, if you can take a symbol, that is the biggest symbol, that is the greatest symbol, that each human form is a symbol of God. Worship him. Serve him, in that idea, and you will get spiritual benefit. And if you serve and worship with proper devotion, you will get the greatest result. This is a fact, and if you practise, and try to follow that, you will get the real result. 

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Meditation on the Upanishads

Swami Shraddhananda

(Continued from the previous issue)



SOME DIRECT METHODS of prana control are described in the yoga scriptures. Pranayama is the technique of breath control. Why control the prana? The prana is very closely associated with the mind. When the prana is quiet, the mind is quiet. If we can

harmonise our breathing processes, then it becomes a help to meditation. In hatha yoga, an offshoot of the original yoga of Patanjali, the process of controlling the breath is given. By this process we can improve our body and calm our mind. It really works for people whose minds are

so restless that they cannot concentrate enough to meditate. But the warning is given: 'Do not get hung up on this control. Do not get distracted with improving your body and having power over your prana, since that is not the goal of spiritual life.'

Remember that the aim of all this is to help to concentrate the mind. For a person who has learned to love God and is regularly doing the japa of mantra, repetition of the holy name, that person's prana system is already bound to have calmed down. That is why Sri Ramakrishna did not encourage spiritual seekers to practise pranayama. If we have learned to pray sincerely and meditate and regularly repeat our mantra, then the breath is bound to almost stop. These practices are called a direct assault on the mind since the purpose of yoga is to calm down the *vrittis*, the waves of the mind.

When we tackle prana with knowledge and the love of God, then the whole picture changes. When a devotee has developed the love of repeating their mantra by doing japa, their mind goes to its depths and from that stage they can direct the mantra to these different parts of prana. The holy name of God is one with God. When a devotee learns to direct the prana, then the prana says, 'You need not assault me. I will be your friend.' There is the prana that is in the eyes, the heart, the arms, and the whole body. The devotee then directs the mantra to these different segments of prana and the prana becomes spiritualised. Really speaking, the truth of prana is that it is a manifestation of Atman, the true Self. When this knowledge comes then everything is nothing but Atman, nothing but consciousness. If we have this kind of understanding of the holy name, we can direct the mantra to any rebellious segment of prana. The prana then says, 'Well, I will also participate in your japa. I have no voice so I will repeat the mantra in my own way.' Just

like dogs and cats have their own language, so when the prana is operating in the body there is a vibration. Instead of it being a biological vibration, now it will be a spiritual vibration. We will feel that all segments of our prana have joined in repeating the mantra. If this happens to us, then the prana can no longer be an enemy. It becomes a helpmate to our spiritual search. This can happen with devotion. The devotee can direct the mantra to the blood stream. There is a sound in the blood flow. The mantra will be part of that flow and in the blood stream. When Self-knowledge comes we feel that prana is nothing but consciousness. That is the real demolition of the wall of prana. The ultimate knowledge is when we know that there is nothing but consciousness.

These five walls have to be broken. The method used by Vedanta is knowledge. No one can deny that there is life around us in millions of bodies. Let us make our life principle one with that cosmic prana. We are trying to rise above this irrational attachment to this little prana. Develop a sense of love for unity with all prana. For example, if this body stops what will it matter? If after eighty-two years, our hair is all white, our teeth are shaking, and we are frail and weak? There are millions of other bodies. If a person sincerely feels like this, they are no longer afraid of death. They know that their life principle is only a small portion of the cosmic prana, which is Brahman. This meditation is given as a tool to rise above the sense of individual prana, to overcome attachment to it. Just as we are trying to rise above body-consciousness, so with this meditation we have to rise above identification with the prana.

Class 7: The Sheath of the Mind

Our goal is to separate from the five walls of the *panchamaya kosha*. We have to break them through knowledge or by devotion. It is not that

we stop our life, but we have to detach from these five sheaths and touch the core of consciousness within. We need to understand what these five walls are in order to have detachment from them. We watch the heartbeat, observing the vital sheath, not identifying with the prana. That is one method. Another method is to know that the cosmic aspect of prana is the same in us as is in the insects and every other being. For now, we let our prana be one with the cosmic prana. This practice surely gives a sense of detachment. When we give too much importance to our little personality, we are so much attached. When we think that there are millions of bodies, we lose some of our attachment. Think that after one hundred years none of us will be here. This kind of thinking is essential for Self-knowledge.

The third wall is the *manomaya kosha*, the mental sheath. Desires, memories, and emotions together are called the *manomaya kosha*. We have to spiritualise this mental sheath. Just as the *pranamaya kosha*, the vital sheath, is the soul of the *annamaya kosha*, the body, the mental sheath is the soul of the *pranamaya kosha*.

The mind can be a mad movement of thoughts. It goes its own way. The point is that we have to think of the mind as a wild monkey. All sorts of worthless past memories are stored there and the important point is to make this mind cooperate. We tell it to think of God and it says, 'No! I want to think of monkeys.' To counteract the mind, we have to think of the mind as something divine. It is filled with beautiful, wonderful, spiritual truths. It is true. The mind can be filled with *tamas*, inertia, but it can also be *sattvic*, sublime. So tell the mind, 'You are not a restless monkey. You are the repository of spiritual knowledge. You are made of the wonderful Vedas.' We are trying to think of the mind as a pure and spiritual thing for the purpose of contemplation. Give the mind a spiritual form to transform it.

The same problems we had to face with regard to the physical sheath and the vital sheath arise again here. We are trying to destroy the wall of the mind, but we are mixed up with the mind. A feeling comes and at once we are identified with the emotion that arises. That is not right. A spiritual seeker has to be separate from these passions. We have to try to watch the mind. This will calm the mind. We keep aloof and watch the mind. The next day those thoughts and emotions will say, 'We are not going to appear; he is watching us.' Swami Vivekananda gives emphasis to these techniques in his book, *Raja Yoga*.

Think of the mind as a television set and just watch it. We get a hold on our own mind by watching it. What we see as a horrible out-of-focus picture on our television set is not really horrible to the people who are performing in the studio. The same thing is true with the original nature of the mind. Sublime, spiritual truths are being distorted. However restless the mind appears, try to think of the original beautiful sublime form of the mind. Try to think of the mind as being composed of spiritual wisdom. If you can think of the mind as spirit—for five minutes a day—there will be a transformation. The cosmic mind behind our personality is our support, is driving us.

Another technique is to try to feel that our mind is a part of the cosmic mind, which is only one. There is only one cosmic universal mind and from that mind come all those things of which we are so proud. That cosmic mind projected the mind of Shakespeare and the mind of Kalidasa, the great ancient Indian poet. Try to feel that all that is happening in the mind is really a part of the cosmic mind.

We can call that mind God if you want. This contemplation will make your mind broad and strong. From the individual plane, the mind can rise to the cosmic level. Everything is mind.

Think of the Self as the great mind, the cosmic mind. Let us think of the mind in its original wholeness. It is, as is the whole body, made totally of spiritual vibrations. It is a spiritual principle.

The cosmic mind is a storehouse of all knowledge; it is the background of our memory. We can establish a link with Einstein, with Newton, with all the great saints, with all sublime minds. Our mind can connect with the great repository of eternal ideas. Those ideas are not fleeting, are not fragmented. It is possible to imbibe ideas from that great cosmic mind.

These are the ways of breaking the wall of the mind—being detached from the mental wall and spiritualising it. Really it is only consciousness; it is the Self.

The devotee can apply the mantra, the holy name, to this *manomaya kosha* when memories come and are obsessing the mind. We can apply our mantra to an obsession because the mantra is divine and we know that the divine can do anything. When we apply our mantra to these thoughts, the mind says: ‘Okay, I will also do japa, repeating the holy name.’ What is the sound of the mind when it does japa? The mind says: ‘I cannot say the mantra the way you do. I can only say “poot-dat-tut”’. Just as we appreciate the sound ‘meow’ of the cat, so we can also appreciate the sound of the mind’s way of saying the mantra. For the devotee, the mantra is so wonderful that we want it to go everywhere. Then the mind becomes pure. Sri Ramakrishna told us that the pure mind and pure Self are the same. When the mind is spiritualised it can no longer be an obstruction to the Self. The real truth of the mind is that it is consciousness. In this way one has to overcome this mind.

Class 8: The Vijnanamaya Kosha, the Fourth Covering

These five coverings of the Self, the *panchamaya*

kosha, are the five walls that hide the truth of the Self. To realise our true Self we have to break these five walls—by knowledge, by devotion, by detachment, by dispassion, and by redirecting our identification. Normally when we say ‘I’, we feel that this body is ‘I’. Sometimes we mean the second wall, the prana, the life force, the flow of the blood, or the vital energy. The prana is there, but ‘I’ am not the prana, nor the body. The third sheath, the mental sheath, *manomaya kosha*, consists of thoughts, desires, and emotions. We need to realise that the mind is something that is jumping before us; we are not the mind. All of these koshas, the sheaths covering our Self-knowledge, are the play of maya. We have to cross these barriers and stabilise our Self-knowledge. Our Vedantic practice is our attempt to cross these barriers.

The fourth *kosha* involves the *buddhi*, the part of the mind where thoughts are well defined. ‘It is four o’clock. I am hungry.’ From the hundreds of amorphous thoughts in the mind, only one thought takes form. *Buddhi* belongs to the fourth *kosha*, the *vijnanamaya kosha*. A sense of agency is the most important function of the *buddhi*. After the *buddhi* decides, then comes action. This *vijnanamaya kosha* is driving our life. It is the ego. It has two functions: the doer and the enjoyer. We act because we want something. Our whole life is centred in this sense of individuality; however, our true nature is the Self. We need not act nor enjoy because everything is already within us. The Atman, the Self, is ever pure and timeless.

Sometimes it is possible to feel that we are not this body, not the life force, not the mind. Sometimes we want to kill ourselves because our mind is full of dirty things. We can also feel that we are not our prana. We can feel separate from the koshas. When we come to this fourth wall, where our very individuality is within, it is very difficult

to separate ourselves. All the time we feel that we are the enjoyer or the actor—the one who experiences. Constant experiences come to us but we cannot run away from this ego. Until we have attained freedom we think that we are this individual, this little ego, the *viññanamaya kosha*.

The story of ‘me’ as an individual is so very important to each of us. To others it may not be important, but to us it is very interesting. This *viññanamaya kosha* is almost impregnable. We are afraid to even think of losing our individuality. We say, ‘Oh, where shall I go if my individuality goes? I never want to go away from my individuality.’ Even at death’s door we say, ‘Oh, I am going to go to heaven.’

Really speaking, the Atman is dreaming this vast universe. The Atman is infinitely more than even this vast universe. The universe is all a projection of the Self, but until we know the Self we will cling to our individuality. The basic things that we want as individuals are knowledge, existence, and joy—the things that are the nature of the Self. Everything that is living has existence for only a limited period of time. When we know that we are the infinite Self, then we will know that nothing can diminish us.

In serious spiritual life, we are trying to rise above this state of limitation—the sense of ‘I’ as the actor and the individual. The enjoyer has to be removed by a higher knowledge. To know we are separate from this individuality, that is the challenge. How do we break this *viññanamaya kosha*? How can it be done?

There is a cosmic individuality. Just as we are each an individual, so millions of other living beings feel they are also individuals. Each individual feels that they are so important to themselves that they ignore what is happening around them. Each human being has an individual ego. This ‘I’ is everywhere and we like to display this ‘I’. If anyone says anything against us, we say, ‘Oh, he dares

to say this to me!’ One has to think of this and then think of the totality of all these individualities. There is a cosmic individuality and each ego is a part of that cosmic ego. We can try to think that we are one with that cosmic ego, meditate on this great cosmic ego, and afterwards feel the quiet that this contemplation provides.

Another method to break through the *viññanamaya kosha* is the method of analysis. If we have a glimpse of this ego as separate from us, it is the Self that is the real perceiver. Try to pose as the Self and pretend to be watching the play of this ego sheath, namely its agency and its enjoyment. When we do this analysis we feel separate from this ego, just as when we were watching this body and felt separate from the body and when we were watching the prana, we were separate from the prana.

In the method of devotion, we say that all actions are coming from God: ‘I am not doing anything. God is doing everything.’ The devotees feel that they are the servants of God. The ego then becomes a slave of God. If someone insults a devotee, the devotee will say it is God’s will that they are being insulted. When we are serious about religion we are thankful when someone hurts our ego. Tulasidas, the sixteenth-century saint and poet, directed us to ‘go to those places where people insult you. Then you will be humbled and thus closer to God. It is your foolish ego that hides the vision of God from you.’ Being humble and removing the ego is helpful to the growth of our devotion. The devotee of God does not think that he or she is important, but rather thinks of the vast glory of God.

Each moment God is bringing millions of beings into existence. Through the ages, think of the millions of beings who have been born. They were born and lived and desired and died. They had lives much like our lives. The Upanishads prescribe this meditation on humanity. If we

expand our heart in this way, then we will identify less with the ego, the *vijñanamaya kosha*.

We have to try to practise all these methods so that we can get to the innermost core of our existence. Knowledge is important, but knowledge is bondage at the highest level. The less one reads the better. Better to read one verse of the Upanishad and let it work deep into the mind. Go deeper and deeper. It is so difficult to imagine that we can exist without breathing, without life. The Self does not breathe, yet the Self is infinite existence. We have to practise detachment and Vedantic analysis. Contemplation on these teachings has to be practised to remove the five walls covering the Self, which hide the light of consciousness. We practise by using these techniques to reduce our attachment to these five walls. The walls will be there, but they will not be able to obstruct our vision of the Self. We must practise these techniques to know that our true nature is the light of consciousness.

Class 9: The Bliss Sheath

In this chapter, we have come to the last sheath that covers the Self, namely the bliss sheath, the *anandamaya kosha*. We must remember that all joy is coming from Brahman, that Brahman is *ananda*, bliss. There may be a little confusion about the two terms *anandamaya kosha* and *ananda*. One Vedantic name for God is *satchidananda*, existence, knowledge, and bliss absolute. Ananda is often described as God, not in the sense of little pleasures, but as the New Testament of the Christian Bible says: 'The peace that passeth all understanding.'⁸ The whole world is an expression of *ananda*. We have to critically analyse this concept because there is much misunderstanding about the theme of *ananda*. The highest truth of Brahman, that highest unity, cannot be described by any concept. All we can say is '*neti, neti*; not this, not this'.

When we identify ourselves with the body, we are bound within the wall of the body. When we identify ourselves with the prana, the life principle, we are bound within that wall. We cannot seem to think of our existence apart from the body and life. But we must go deeper to see that the Self is more than the body, more than life. The second wall has to go, not by killing one's self, but by the proper techniques as we have already discussed. The third wall is the mind, but the Self is above the mind. All the thoughts, desires, and aspirations come from the mental sheath, the *manomaya kosha*. We have to go beyond the mind, not by killing the mind, but by telling it, 'Stay there and do not try to bind me'. From the fourth sheath, the *vijñanamaya kosha*, comes the ego sense. The ego is the little individuality from which the sense of agency and enjoyment comes. It is from the bliss sheath that all joy comes. The pleasures we experience, such as when we see a beautiful tree or any other pleasure—all these different forms of *ananda* come from the bliss sheath. The wall of bliss is the subtlest.

Another thing to remember is that when Brahman is described as *satchidananda*, there is no contradiction. When we say Brahman is past all the walls, even the bliss sheath, we mean that to find the truth of the Self we must negate *ananda*. The mind has to go past God—we must even renounce God. The highest renunciation, *para vairagya*, takes us to the Self, the highest level of truth, past everything. When we come down from that experience the whole world is *satchidananda*.

The idea of the wall of *ananda* has to be understood in all of these contexts. This bliss sheath is not something permanent. It comes and it goes. Someday we will have to go beyond the wall of *anandamaya kosha*. When Self-knowledge comes it will include everything.

First we must pass through the process of negation. Just as when planting a garden, we have to dig out everything and then it is all barren and looks ugly, our spiritual life—especially on the path of self-analysis—has a period of destruction, of digging out and throwing away everything. When we think that this body is a piece of Mother Earth, then our body attachment is cut in half. The same is true of our prana, the life force. When we think that prana is everywhere, our attachment to life is minimised. When the attachment of life is lessened we will feel that if death comes, so what? Life is everywhere. When we think that the mind is a part of the cosmic mind, we will have less attachment to our mental sheath.

The same type of practice is necessary to break this last wall. We must tell ourselves that all bliss is coming from God. God is Brahman. Brahman is *ananda*. While eating we can feel, 'The joy that I am experiencing is coming from God.' The binding effect of pleasure will thus be minimised. With any kind of experience of joy or pleasure, think that all these joys and pleasures are really coming from Brahman. This is how to break this last wall. Otherwise it is a very strong bondage. Even when one has grown old and the doctor says, 'You have to give up coffee,' we find it is very difficult. The love of pleasure is a terrible bondage for a seeker of truth.

All these five different sheaths are necessary for the individual in practical life. Sometimes we identify first with one sheath and then with another, but now we seek freedom from these five *koshas*. In our practical life we know there is a difference between joys. It is a *sattvic* joy when we see a loved one after a long time. It is quiet, it is joy, and it is calmness. If we go to a place of pilgrimage, it is a sublime pleasure like the story of the man from South America who went to the Holy Land. When he returned he was a different man. He said: 'There, I found there was only God.' That

is *sattvic* joy. It is associated with disinterested love, which is joy and unity. That kind of joy is called *priya*. It is an unselfish love of the highest category of joy. Another kind of joy is that which follows the acquisition of a long awaited desire, such as a new Cadillac. Another kind of joy is the delight that occurs when joy has reached its acme, like winning the Irish Sweepstakes.

Within us is this fine wall of joy, this *anandamaya kosha*. The Upanishad says that the most complete identification with the bliss sheath is when we are in the state of deep sleep. All beings look forward to deep sleep, even the cat, the dog, or the fish. In deep sleep the individual is identified with the bliss sheath. Then we are really peaceful and we need that deep sleep. God is so kind that he gives us deep sleep. In the waking state our experience of bliss is always mixed up with some disturbance. In deep sleep we are not disturbed since there is no thought there. The mind is not present in our deep sleep, so we do not say, 'I am experiencing bliss'.

The fifth wall is the source of any kind of joy that we experience. All the time we are seeking joy and pleasure, but it does not really come to us. There are many different types of joy, but they all come from this last covering of the Self. It is the subtlest wall of the five *koshas*. Any kind of joy—even the bliss that is coming from sense pleasure—is coming from that same *kosha*. The *anandamaya kosha* is the nearest wall to the Self, so in each experience we can potentially discover the joy of Brahman.

In spiritual life, joy is experienced on another level. Bliss really belongs to *sattva*, the sublime state of the mind. When our mind is filled with the restless activity of *rajas*, there is no bliss. Bliss cannot come if the mind is troubled. When the mental restlessness is too prevalent there cannot be any degree of *sattva*. Any kind of enjoyment needs the background of *sattvic* calmness.

The *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* has a chapter describing the grades of bliss. It says that the quality of our bliss will be according to the constitution of our mind. A *tamasic* person who is dull and inert enjoys food in that *tamasic* way. The people of *rajasic* and the *sattvic* tendencies each enjoy food differently. A devoted person feels that it is God within who is enjoying the food. That person has enjoyment that is calm, sweet, and not distracted. If the mind is cleaned of passions the experience is finer. Those who feel that the joy of God is in the food, the table, and the friendly company, feel the joy that comes from the bliss sheath is certainly coming from God. Then the pleasure that we experience from the *anandamaya kosha* is of a different type. When our desires are controlled and our passions are reduced, the joy is sweeter.

The scriptures give us this warning: 'Do not allow your mind to be attached to that bliss.' Even the joy of meditation comes from the fifth wall. We will even have to throw away the joy of meditation because it is an objective experience. The true Self is neither the object nor the subject. If we want that ultimate experience, we must go past the joy of meditation. The joy of mantra yoga is one kind of joy and the joy of meditation is another kind. Eventually we have to go to the Self, past all the five walls.

As we discussed in the case of the physical, vital, mental, and ego sheaths, one way of freeing ourselves from the bondage of these sheaths is the practice of expansion, of cosmic contemplation. We normally feel that we are separate. We can expand our identity and think that this vast Mother Earth is supplying all the materials that make up this body. In this way our mind becomes more and more detached from this little bag of flesh and bones. We need to practise these cosmic meditations.

Any living creature can say, 'I am beautiful'.

We think this human body is the only beautiful body, but the frog can also say, 'I am beautiful'. In the novel *Dr Zhivago* by Boris Pasternak, the doctor is consoling a dying old woman and says, 'Don't you see life everywhere?' There is a cosmic life and we are in that cosmic life. All the time, the whole universe is part of our life, our personality. Yet we suffer if our pet dog gets lost. Shift the focus and see how we are part of other things. Extend the prana to the cosmic level. Extend the mind, the *manomaya kosha*; the ego and *buddhi* sheath, *vijnanamaya kosha*; and the bliss sheath, the *anandamaya kosha* to the cosmic level.

If we can place these joys in the right place, then they will not be a bondage to us. As the Bhagavadgita tells us, the mind will then become our friend. One has to know that we are different from these five sheaths. The Atman is the core of our personality. It is because of the Atman that the body, the life, the mind, the ego, and the bliss sheaths are there. In this kind of self-analysis, one has to be a spectator to the breaking of these five walls. Practise these meditations in this way. Feel that all these five walls are part of God—that is the method of devotion. Then again, do the Vedantic practices of negating all of them.

Good deeds can give some joy, but it is soon over. It is limited, not infinite—though joy comes from the infinite Brahman. If the mind becomes pure, it can reach that joy which is Brahman.

The basic joy God has given us has no price. To live is to be joyful. There is infinite joy, infinite life within us. How do we know this? The sages give clues. We then have to find out for ourselves.

We are not a mass of joy only in regard to this body, but with regard to the whole universe. If one has the capacity to see that joy is everywhere, then every face, beautiful or ugly, gives one joy. Brahman is behind every face. Having that joy, we may not feel any need of going further, but living

in this joy is dualistic. The time will come to make the final jump—from the object to the subject.

When we say God is *ananda*, it is that infinite storehouse of bliss that we are talking about. In this way we can understand the difference between God as *ananda* and Brahman, which is so great that neither thoughts nor mind can reach there.

When people die they can enter into that *ananda*. In our meditation, try to think of God as *ananda*, the source of all bliss. Those who meditate on a form of God can think of the face of God as beaming with joy, that *ananda*, which is *saguna* Brahman. Just remember that this kind of meditation is not *nirguna* Brahman, which cannot be an object of our meditation.

If we want to reach that *ananda*, we have to make our mind more and more *sattvic*. Instead of enjoying the gross pleasures, such as a well-prepared fish dish, the joy of God is an infinitely more wonderful joy. But do not stop with experiencing God as *ananda*. Keep going. The more profound the experience is, then words begin to fail. We love words, but when we die we have to let go of them. There is no thought and no mind and no life there. But do not be afraid. The Self is projecting infinite things and ideas. The Self is much higher than any concept of words.

The *panchamaya kosha*, the five walls or sheaths of ignorance, surround the true Self. Our object is to penetrate and break down these five walls and be one with the changeless reality of our Self. Our home is there, but we have been away from that home, travelling in these five regions—namely, the body, the life force, the mind, the ego, and the bliss sheaths. We have to understand what these five coverings are and find our way out of them. They are not our true home. We mistakenly identify with all of the five sheaths. Our goal is to get out of the koshas and identify with our true nature. Our true Self

is infinitely more than the five sheaths. We have to expand and consciously, using these Vedantic methods, penetrate the five *koshas*.

Class 10: Existence

We have discussed the five walls that are obstructing the truth of the Self. As our mind becomes pure we can experience finer and finer grades of joy. Each one gets closer and closer to the Self, then the Self is revealed. There are gradations of knowledge of the Self. At one stage, the Self perceives the physical sheath. The Self is also observing the mind and the ego. The Self is the silent witness of the bliss sheath and the observer of deep sleep.

As we try to experience the Self as different from the five sheaths, then the distinction between the witness and the observed vanishes. We go from the *drig*, the seer or perceiver, to the *drishya*, the object seen. Finally, there is no difference between Self and non-Self. At the last stage, we have to follow the words of the sages in the scriptures or ‘the blind leading the blind’ will be the result. At last we will know that it is the Self that is projecting everything. The Self appears as space; it is not different from space, and the same with time. The Self is appearing as time. When we have a glimpse of the Self, then we may have to pursue this knowledge for years to have a steady hold on it. But through the entire pursuit, in the background of our mind, we know it is all the Self.

In this way, one has to be stable in this knowledge. We must remember to keep the knowledge of non-dual Vedanta, as Sri Ramakrishna said: ‘Tie the knowledge of nonduality in a corner of your cloth and then do as you please.’⁹ As we can understand, if there is attachment or desire, then knowledge of the Self will not come. We must pay attention to the eternal. At this stage, the mind has to develop *vairagya*m, detachment.

Know that there is nothing real here. This knowledge has to become secure knowledge.

We do our duty. As soon as the manifold is there, then there is pain. When the *rajasic* state of the mind comes, then there is pain. When the mind is wild and jumping, then there is pain. So the seeker comes to meditation and wipes away this entire manifold. The more stable this knowledge is, the quicker the seeker goes deep. We have to practise meditation until it has become stable. It is the Self that is appearing as manifold. The Atman is continually projecting this manifold. At last, when the mind has stopped and our words and forms have stopped, then it is indescribable. We no longer say it is God. No. We remember that truth. That truth is indescribable and we hate to use words. That seer does not like to talk. These are some of the different stages of Self-knowledge.

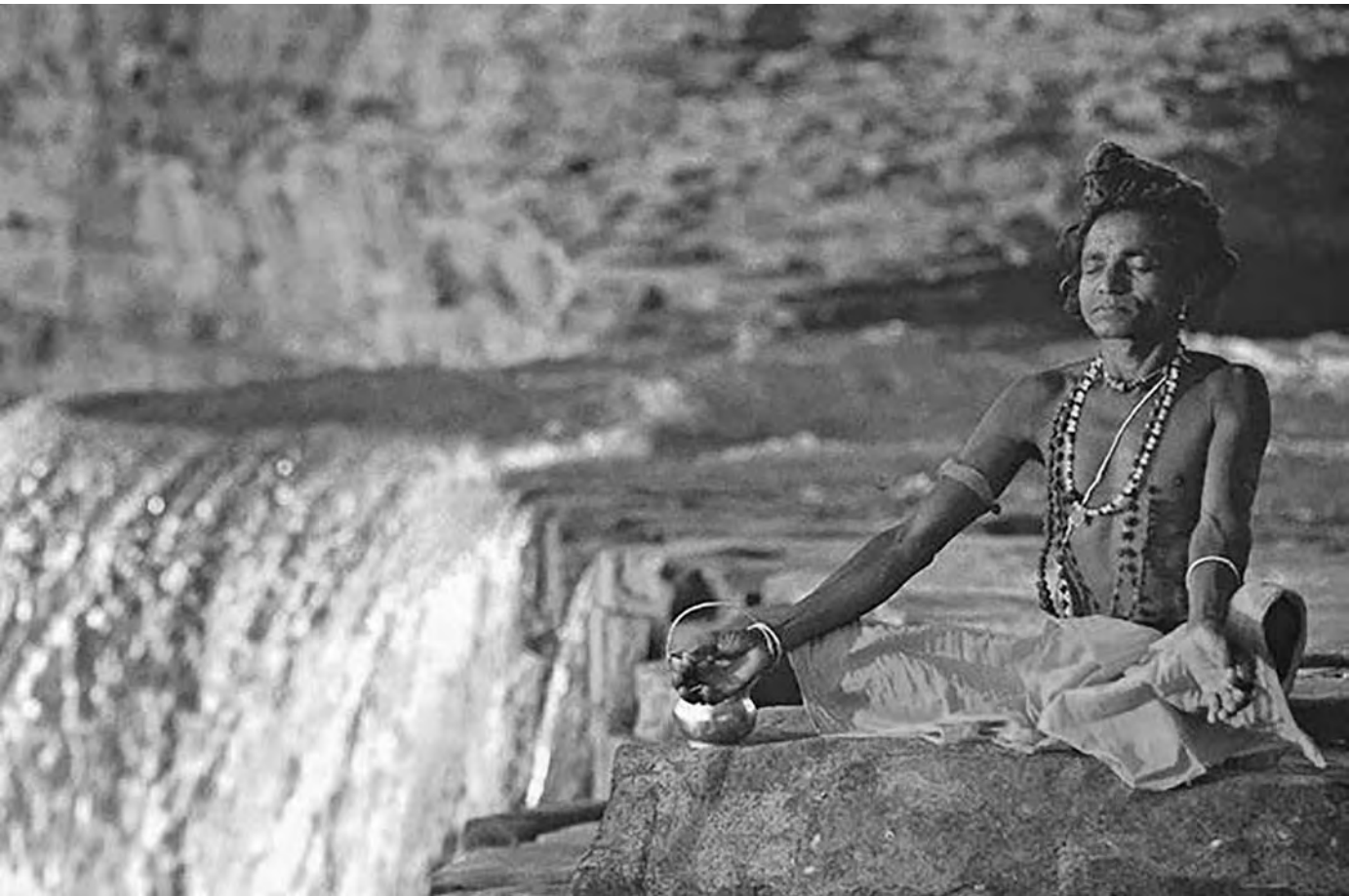
In the first stage, we are trying to watch our

thoughts and ego. We say: 'I am not the mind; I am not the ego.' We must keep trying to have as much detachment as possible. How do we get rid of our strong ego and our restless mind and senses? Through self-analysis one has to rise slowly above these five walls. How can we be convinced of the existence of the Self? Beyond all sheaths is the Self: 'Vain and useless becomes his life who thinks of Brahman as nonexistent. He alone who knows Brahman as existent truly lives.'¹⁰

(To be continued)

References¹.

8. Philippians 4:7.
9. Swami Saradananda, *Sri Ramakrishna and His Divine Play*, trans. Swami Chetanananda (St Louis: Vedanta Society of St Louis, 2003), 421.
10. *The Upanishads: Breath of the Eternal*, translated by Swami Prabhavananda and Frederick Manchester, (Hollywood: Vedanta Press, 1975), 84.



BALABODHA

Ancient Wisdom Made Easy

Guna

GUNA is a commonly used Sanskrit word. It is used by people, who do not even know Sanskrit, as it is present in almost every Indian language. The widely used meaning of the word 'guna' is property, but it is necessary to see the other meanings and the origins of this word. This is a Sanskrit word. Sanskrit is a classical language like Greek, Latin, and Persian. And in Sanskrit, as in most classical languages, most words are derived from a stem or root.

The word 'guna' can be derived from the root *gun*, which means to advise, multiply, and invite. It can be also derived from the root *gana*, which means to count or enumerate. The word 'guna' can also be derived from the root *grah*, which means to seize, take, adopt, grasp, hold, take side, stop, arrest, catch, capture, imprison, take possession of, captivate, overpower, eclipse, rob, abstract, gain, win, obtain, receive, accept, keep, acquire, collect, store, include, undertake, undergo, begin, observe, apprehend, understand, learn, admit, and approve.

The word 'guna' means a good quality, merit, virtue, excellence, eminence, effect, result, efficacy, thread, string, rope, cord, bowstring, the string of a musical instrument, a sinew, attribute, and property. The word 'guna' also means a multiplier, coefficient, or the number of fold or times, in the case of numbers. The word 'guna' denotes any one of the three properties belonging to any created thing: sattva, rajas, and tamas. An object pertaining to any of the sense organs or sense objects can also be called 'guna', like the objects connected to the senses of sight, smell, touch, sound, and taste. The word 'guna' also means a secondary element,

a subordinate part, excess, abundance, superfluity, an adjective, and a word subordinate to another word in a sentence. It can also mean a quality inherent to a rasa or mood. It can also mean the property of the meaning or class of words.

'Guna' can also mean one of the six strategies used by a statesman for politics with other countries: *sandhi*, peace; *vigraha*, war; *yana*, march or expedition; *sthana* or *asana*, halt; *sanshraya*, seeking shelter; and *dvaiddha* or *dvaiddhibhava*, duplicity. A sense organ can also be called 'guna'. 'Guna' also means a subordinate dish and it is also one of the names of Bhima. It also means a species, subdivision, or a kind or category. It can also mean leaving or abandoning.

Different branches of Indian philosophy treat the word 'guna' in different ways. The Sankhya system of thought considers everything to have a balance of the three gunas of sattva, rajas, and tamas. The Nyaya system says that there are universally seventeen or twenty-four gunas, according to the early and later scholars respectively. In the Vaisheshika philosophy 'guna' denotes one of the seven *padarthas*, categories.

The sixteenth and eighteenth chapters of the Bhagavadgita enumerate different categories of actions based on the three gunas of sattva, rajas, and tamas. In Ayurveda, 'guna' denotes one of the twenty fundamental properties of a substance. In Sanskrit grammar, 'guna' refers to the strengthening of the simple vowels by a preceding *a*. According to Advaita Vedanta, one has to transcend the three gunas and attain to one's true nature.



TRADITIONAL TALES

The Miracle That Brought Faith

(Continued from the previous issue)

THE ROBBER SALUTED the pandit. Then, he left in the northern direction just like an arrow that has left its bow. After the robber left, the pandit rolled in laughter. He thought: 'He is a crystallised first-rate fool even among fools! He is going to see Sri Krishna, it seems! It seems he is to rob the *kaustubha* gem! Really?'

However, the pandit's laughter soon turned into worry: 'After wandering here and there for four-five days, if the robber returns and says, "I could not find anything that you said", and beat me. Okay, let him come! Is he not a fool, who accepts whatever is told to him? I will send him in another direction. Before he returns from there, I will finish by Bhagavata recital here and leave for my home.' The pandit consoled himself with these thoughts.

The robber forgot his meals and sleep. Day and night, his mind was filled with the forms of the two boys, decorated with precious ornaments. He could not think anything other than ways of robbing the ornaments. Was he moving towards the north or the south? He did not know the direction. He was walking and walking, and his walking did not seem to end. He was untouched by people's laughter or beauty. He was oblivious of the melodious chirping of the birds. He did not pay any attention to the mountains, rivers, and forests on the way. He was unaware of the pricks on his feet caused by stones and thorns. The fig tree! Sri Krishna playing his flute under that tree. His divine ornaments. The robber had become one with these thoughts.

On the way came a place. The robber saw

attentively. 'Yes! This is the same place that the pandit talked about. Here is the river that flows speedily with a burble. There is this small hillock. But where is the fig tree?' He searched for the fig tree. 'There is the fig tree! I have found it. I have found it.' The robber danced and danced in joy. He thought: 'Where should I hide so that I can see the coming of Sri Krishna and Balarama? Where should I hide? How should I pounce upon them? How should I snatch their ornaments?' The robber rehearsed his moves many times. As if afraid of the robber's anxiety, the sun hid itself behind the hill, retracting its golden rays.

The robber felt that the night was not passing at all. All he could think of was the coming of Sri Krishna and his robbing of the priceless ornaments. As time passed, the robber became more anxious, excited, and even pained with the thought that he had to see Sri Krishna. He thought: 'The pandit said that the radiance of the *kaustubha* gem would drown the light of sun. What will happen if by the gem's light, the boys find out that I am hiding on the branch of a tree and run away? No, I should hide on the top of the tree. No, no, that would not be right. What if the boys run away by the time I climb down from the tree? No, that cannot be! I would hide in the bushes on the ground. I would pounce on them the moment they arrive, and catch them.' Thinking thus, the robber was climbing up the tree and hiding behind a bush. He was running hither and thither.

The robber made his ears alert and tried to hear

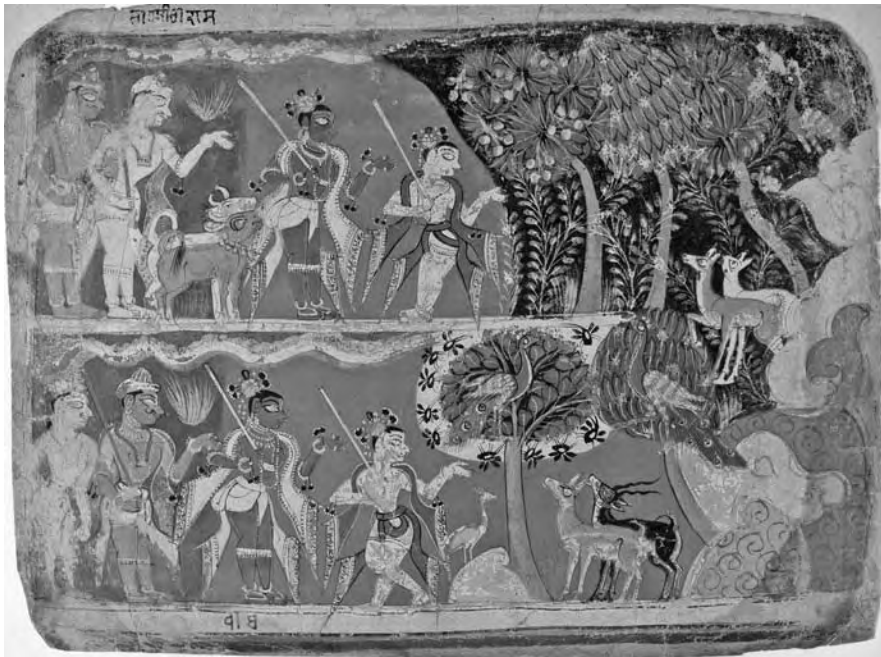
if there was a sweet melody of flute. His whole mind was drawn to searching for the melody. He had only one thought: 'It is about to be dawn. Sri Krishna is about to come. I would pounce and grab him. I would snatch all his ornaments.' Even while he was watching, it seemed that someone was coming. The robber's heartbeat increased. He jumped down to the ground from the tree. But, he could not hear the flute. He climbed the tree again. He sharpened his ears and listened attentively. No, he could not hear the flute. It was as if his heart would burst. 'Probably, it is some delusion of my mind.' He climbed again and got up to the topmost branch of the tree. There's the sound! Yes, indeed, it was the flute! The sound of the flute was nearing him. The robber's mind overflowed with the height of feelings. He could not contain the surge of happiness within him. He swooned, lost consciousness, and fell on the ground. He became conscious after some time. He opened his eyes, got up, and saw with wide-open eyes.

There! There were coming two radiant boys

through the forest path! They were images of unsurpassed beauty that could make the entire universe spellbound. In front of that great orb of radiance, even the darkness of that dense forest disappeared without a trace. All the other cowherd boys and the cattle had already gone away. The robber saw Sri Krishna and Balarama arriving. He was spellbound by their beauty and kept looking at them without batting an eyelid. His mouth shut, his heart opened. 'Aha! What beautiful faces are these! It is as if their eyes are showering nectar! There are priceless ornaments on their bodies! Oh! How did the parents of these boys have the heart to send them to graze cattle? My mind wants to keep on looking at their faces. Alas! What is this cowardice! I am a robber. Have not I come here to rob the ornaments of these boys? I am a robber and yet here I am showing compassion! No, this does not be-become me, it does not befit me.' Thinking thus, the robber ran towards Sri Krishna and Balarama.

(To be continued)

Krishna and Balarama Grazing Cattle



REVIEWS

For review in PRABUDDHA BHARATA,
publishers need to send **two** copies of their latest publications



***The Lily of the Field and
The Bird of the Air:
Three Godly Discourses***

Søren Kierkegaard

Translated by Bruce H Kirmmse

Princeton University Press, 41 William Street, Princeton, New Jersey 08540, USA. 2016. xxxvi + 902 pp. \$16.95. HB. ISBN 9780691170473.

Søren Kierkegaard has left insightful and penetrating texts on the inner life. He gave context to contemplation on and surrender to God. The awareness of agency in a spiritual aspirant creates the obstacle of letting the grace flow freely into one. The lily of the field and the bird of the air breathe a freedom that the conscious agency of a human being restrict. Jesus Christ, *Ashtavakra Gita*, the Bible, the Upanishads, and countless other spiritual tracts point to immense possibilities offered by an unrestricted spiritual life brought about by the complete rescindment of agency. Intrinsic to the sense of agency is the possibility of this freedom. This is brought out well in this new translation of the original Danish by Kierkegaard. Aphoristic in expression, profound in content, these words propel the reader to make profundity one's nature. From the 'domesticated Christianity' that has led to an 'established Christendom' (xiii), Kierkegaard beckons us to let 'Nature Point beyond Nature' (vii). If ever the size of a book could be misleading it is here! One cannot read this book without getting pulled into an involuntary spell of meditation.

The one thing that always comes in the way of becoming free of any will is the great burden of desires. Kierkegaard informs us that 'the wish is the consolation that disconsolateness invents' (12). Kirmmse has retained the original mystique and poetry of Kierkegaard. That he has been able to do that in English is indeed a feat that deserves

poignant accolades. Childlike simplicity is integral to the spiritual life of an aspirant. One has to practise this simplicity in order to eventually attain it. The child is sincerest as 'the child never looks for an evasion or an excuse' (14). Kirmmse has given us a most accessible primer to Kierkegaard through this translation. His masterly introduction locates the text and its author, and also gives a lucid preamble to Kierkegaard's thought. He prepares the reader to wade through the eleven-volume *Kierkegaard's Journals and Notebooks*, of which Kirmmse is the general editor.

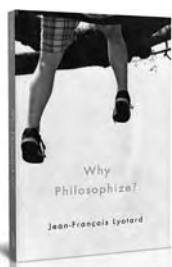
It is indubitable that Kirmmse is the best expounder of Kierkegaard; he doubles up as Kierkegaard's modern pen. Who else can bring to English this wonderful truth: 'Only the person who is joy itself becomes unconditionally joyful, and only by becoming unconditionally joyful does one become joy itself' (75). The first discourse is about the birds and the lilies, but in essence, it is about silence. Kierkegaard emphasises that silence 'expresses respect for God' (29). The Upanishads talk about the choice between *shreyas*, the preferable and *preyas*, the pleasurable. This choice determines one's proximity to God. We choose to be either with God or without God. It is human fallacy to think there is a middle path. As Swami Vivekananda echoes the sentiment found in many scriptures of world religions, one cannot worship both God and the world. Here too, Kierkegaard is profound in meaning: 'God's patience corresponds to human disobedience' (62).

If one reads this book, or more likely, contemplates on its content, one would be wondering why is Kierkegaard not studied by *all* school or college students. While material enhancements have brought comfort to our lives, they have also made our hearts and thoughts narrower. Polarised beyond measure, the present-day youth needs to get a perspective on things and life, and

nothing can put things in perspective like this slim volume. The scripture loses its relevance and becomes meaningless if it is not practised. Kierkegaard emphasises the praxis of scripture: 'The most important thing for the gospel is not to reprimand and scold; what is most important for the gospel is to get human beings to follow its guidance' (38). This book inspires one to take the first step towards practising the guidelines and also to know more about Kierkegaard and what he has to say.

Editor

Prabuddha Bharata



Why Philosophize?

Jean-François Lyotard

Translated by Andrew Brown

Polity Press, 65 Bridge Street, Cambridge CB2 1UR, UK. www.polity-books.com. 2014. viii + 123 pp. \$12.95. PB. ISBN 9780745670737.

Philosophy is seen as a dry business. It is often considered to be the pastime of overread zealots, who are desperate to have some fixated world view. In the same vein, many have stereotyped Jean-François Lyotard to be just a postmodern thinker. Lyotard was definitely one, no arguing that, but he was more importantly a great philosopher. This book that raises a pertinent question, a book that questions the very need for philosophy, is a timely addition to the library of all philosophers and philosophy students. Lyotard substitutes the almost cliché question, 'What is philosophy?' with the more far-reaching question, 'Why philosophise?'. He does this because he is concerned that 'philosophy misses itself' (17). This book is a translation of a typed text preserved at the Bibliothèque littéraire Jacques Doucet, Paris. The text is the transcript of a series of lectures Lyotard gave to the students of Sorbonne University, Paris and the French original was first published only in 2012. Of the many merits of Andrew Brown's translation, striking is his giving the French original of words that cannot be properly translated into English. Lyotard situates the need for philosophy in the more basic need for desire. He asks the important question: 'Why desire?'

Lyotard contends that philosophy has gone out of the space of philosophy and has lost its form because the need for philosophy comes from the need to be, the need to exist.

While analysing the need for desire, Lyotard clarifies the contribution of Freud: 'If ... Freud's work has had and continues to have the impact that you are aware of, this is definitely not because he put sexuality everywhere ... rather, because Freud embarked on forging a link between sexual life and emotional life, social life, and religious life, and brought sexual life out of its ghetto' (27). Lyotard intends to give a Freud insight to the need for philosophising: 'What the philosopher desires is not that different desires be convinced and conquered, but that they be inflected and reflected' (37). Philosophising, according to Lyotard, is a basic desire, and to question this desire is absurd. To him 'to philosophize is not to desire wisdom, it is to desire desire' (38). He concludes that 'we philosophize because it desires' (43). To philosophise is to bring order and bring out philosophy that has become concealed, and lost unity.

Lyotard continues in this strain and positions speech as following thought and says 'we need to realize that to think is already to speak' (73). Lyotard emphasises the need for action but cautions: 'If the world needs to be transformed, this is because it is already transformed. There is in the present something that announces, anticipates and beckons the future' (112). Just as thought is integral to speech, it is integral to action: 'Transformative action cannot manage without a "theory" in the true sense of the world (sic), in other words a speech that risks saying' (113). Lyotard gives a wonderful summary of the need for philosophising: 'So this is why we philosophize: because there is desire, because there is absence in presence, deadness in life ... and finally because we cannot evade this: testifying to the presence of the lack with our speech' (123). Lyotard ends his book by asking how is it possible to be without philosophy. That is the correct question to ask: how is it possible to be without thinking? This book is a welcome addition to the philosophy corpus and enlightens us on Lyotard's early thoughts.

Editor

Prabuddha Bharata

MANANA

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Reputation:

What It Is And Why It Matters

Gloria Origgi

Princeton University Press, 41 William Street, Princeton, New Jersey 08540. 2018. xv + 272 pp. \$29.95. HB. ISBN 9780691175355.

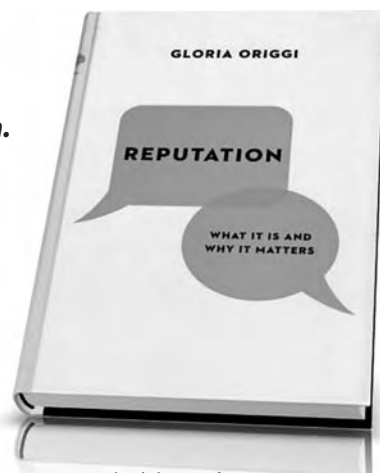
Reputation and Rationality

THE FRAUGHT QUEST for reputation can propel some individuals into committing extreme, senseless, and absurdly risky acts. The violent emotions associated with such destructive and self-destructive behavior might suggest that reputation—assuming it refers to something real rather than imaginary—is a fundamentally nonrational or subrational driver of human behavior. If Jean-Claude Romand had undertaken even a cursory cost-benefit analysis to determine what to do, would he not have concluded that slaughtering his entire family was more costly than suffering the embarrassment of confessing the phoniness of his public reputation?

Up to this point, admittedly, I have focused on a few particularly disturbing cases where devotion to reputation verges on delirium. In these cases, a compulsive fixation on how others view us became so blindingly irrational that it precipitated a personal catastrophe. But it is obvious that there is nothing particularly irrational about the need to gain, uphold, or embellish one's reputation. A judicious investment in the management of one's public image is almost sure to have beneficial results. Knowing how to make others speak approvingly about us, for instance, is a valuable social skill. The ability to

come across as reliable and caring, too, is almost sure to be rewarded.

In order to explore the various ways in which cultivating one's reputation, given the costs it imposes and the benefits it confers, can be a rational strategy, we need to make some preliminary remarks about rationality. In this mostly methodological chapter, I will be employing the term 'rationality' in a strictly minimal sense. Actions can be considered rational, as I am using the term, if they conform to the elementary constraint of maximizing utility (however defined) by reducing costs compared to benefits. This is a very simple and parsimonious principle that permits us to make predictions about the behavior not only of human beings but also of animals, robots, large companies, and so forth—in short, of every entity that can plausibly be treated as a decision-making agent. Any rational actor, able to make decisions about how to behave in the future, will respect this constraint. For example, if I observe someone who has decided to buy a vacuum cleaner on the Internet and who has two sites open before him or her, one where the product in question is selling for \$200 and another where the product can be purchased for only \$150, I can predict, without knowing anything about this person, that he or she will prefer to buy a new vacuum cleaner on the second site instead




of the first. Similarly, if, on spotting a goldfish foraging for food in a pond, I toss it two pieces of bread, one near where it is swimming and the other farther away, I can predict that the fish will pounce on the morsel that is closer. Understood in this way, rationality is not a cognitive capacity belonging to agents, or at least not necessarily. It is better understood as a constraint placed on theories or models that aspire to explain and predict the behavior of agents. This is why we can apply it fruitfully to so many different kinds of choosers and decision-making contexts.

Most contemporary social and natural sciences impose this minimal rationality constraint on their models of decision making. Understanding the behavior of agents (individuals, governments, corporations, businesses, animals, and so forth) requires us to postulate that their decision-making systems operate under the constraint of rationality in the indicated minimal sense. An agent decides to undertake an action in order to maximize utility. Its utility, in turn, depends on a hierarchy of preferences that can, in turn, be of various types. We may prefer children to career, nation to the family, and so forth. The order of preferences organizes the space within which options are laid out and choices are made. Crucial for modeling (and making sense of) agents and their actions is that the agents' preference orderings work according to certain logical rules, such as transitivity. If I prefer an apple to a banana and a strawberry to an apple, then minimal rationality dictates that I will prefer a strawberry to a banana. Unless we assume the existence of such constraints, we won't be able to predict what agents will do, even if we know the structure of their preferences. But for the purposes of this chapter, further elaboration on the theory of rational choice would be a distraction. It suffices to be clear that when we speak of rationality, we are simply posing a minimal set of restrictions on the

kinds of explanation that can be plausibly given of human actions. These constraints emphatically prelude explanations such as 'He picked up the fork because a mysterious force compelled him to do it' and favor instead explanations such as 'He picked up the fork because he was hungry'.

This distinction between permissible and impermissible explanations leads us back to our central question: When we attempt to explain the decisions of minimally rational agents by citing their desire to improve or repair their social reputation, are we offering an explanation of the first or second type?

Altruism and Reputation

How to explain *altruism* is one of the classical challenges to rational-choice theory. Is altruism a fundamental social trait? And if it isn't, how can it emerge from the behavior of rational and self-interested agents? Why should rational agents, seeking to maximize benefits, waste time helping others? Why should rational maximizers favor others at his or her own expense? Sociologists claim to have found an explanation for the empirically observable but puzzling existence of altruism in the theory of kin selection. If natural selection acts at the level of genes rather than at the level of individuals, agents will act altruistically toward those to whom they are genetically related—parents or children—or toward the entire group in the case of species where all individuals share the same genetic heritage, as, for example, bees. The problem with this sociobiological hypothesis is that the human species goes far beyond such simple forms of kin-based altruism. Humans regularly display a readiness to cooperate that seems to reflect a capacity for goodwill independent of bloodline and for engaging in mutually beneficial exchanges with entirely unrelated and even unknown individuals. 

REPORTS

Swachchha Bharat Abhiyan (Clean India Campaign)

Coimbatore Mission Vidyalyaya conducted three cleaning drives on 7 and 8 December 2017 in which the Vidyalyaya students cleaned a public road and the premises of a school and a government office. **Kamarpukur** centre carried out a cleanliness drive at Kamarpukur village on 24 December. **Mangaluru Ashrama** conducted the following activities in December: (i) four cleanliness drives in Mangaluru, (ii) a campaign in which about 1,000 volunteers visited nearly 2,500 households in Mangaluru and spread awareness about cleanliness, (iii) cleanliness drives at 50 villages in Dakshina Kannada district, and (iv) cultural competitions on cleanliness-related topics in 107 schools in which 11,000 students took part. **Mysuru Ashrama** conducted 11 cleaning drives from September to December in which a number of volunteers cleaned 44 localities of the city. The volunteers also campaigned in those places to spread awareness about cleanliness.

Celebration of the 150th Birth Anniversary of Swami Abhedanandaji Maharaj

Hyderabad Math conducted a two-day national seminar on Indian Culture and Philosophy on 26 and 27 January 2018 which was attended by about 1,000 delegates. Swami Suvirananda, General Secretary, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, among others addressed the delegates.

Institute of Culture, Kolkata, conducted a national seminar on Indian Culture and Philosophy on 17 and 18 January spread over seven sessions, attended by 255 people. Srimat Swami Gautamanandaji Maharaj, Vice-President, Ramakrishna

Math and Ramakrishna Mission and Adhyaksha, Ramakrishna Math, Chennai, and Swami Suvirananda among others spoke in the inaugural session. The centre also hosted an exhibition from 17 to 24 January on Indian Art which was inaugurated by Swami Gautamanandaji.

Pune Math held a national seminar on Indian Culture and Philosophy on 21 January which was attended by 343 delegates.

Celebration of the 150th Birth Anniversary of Sister Nivedita

The following centres commemorated the 150th birth anniversary of Sister Nivedita by holding the programmes mentioned against their names:

Baranagar Math: A students' convention on 9 January which was attended by about 400 students. Swami Suvirananda and others addressed the convention. In addition, cultural programmes were held on 10 and 11 January. **Barisha:** A devotees' convention on 28 January which was attended by nearly 1,300 devotees. **Delhi:** Cultural competitions on the life and message of Sister Nivedita in which 1,176 students from 162 schools participated. Prizes were awarded on 27 January. **Halasuru:** A public meeting on 10 January which was addressed by Sri Vajubhai Vala, Governor of Karnataka, and others. About 900 people attended the meeting. **Hyderabad:** A youths' camp for girl students on 30 December in which 180 girls took part. **Institute of Culture, Kolkata:** An international seminar on 2, 3, and 4 January in which about 300 people took part. **Kamarpukur:** Conventions for youths, devotees and teachers on 12, 13, and 14 January respectively. They were attended altogether by 3,750 people. **Kankurgachhi:** Two lectures on 7 and 10 January. **Madurai:** A public

meeting on 28 January attended by about 800 people. **Nagpur:** Two students' conventions and a lecture on 6, 7, and 8 January in Gadchiroli District which were attended by 1,200 people in all, mostly students. **Ponnampet:** A workshop for primary school teachers on 12 January in which 22 teachers from different schools participated. **Rajamahendravaram:** A music concert on 21 January. **Rahara:** Vivekananda Centenary College: A two-day seminar on Swami Vivekananda and Sister Nivedita on 10 and 11 January; release of the book *Sister Nivedita and Her Contributions to India*, published by the college. **Ranchi Morabadi:** Three youths' conventions in Sonahatu, Tamar, and Burmu blocks in Ranchi district on 17 and 20 December and 10 January. In total, 1,240 people took part in the conventions. **Salem:** The newly installed statue of Sister Nivedita was unveiled on the centre's campus on 5 January. About 1,400 people attended the function held on this occasion. **Sarisha:** A two-day residential youths' camp on 16 and 17 December which was attended by nearly 280 youths. **Swamiji's Ancestral House:** (i) A devotees' convention on 15 January in which about 400 people took part, (ii) Eight lectures at the centre and another eight lectures in and around Kolkata between 22 December and 20 January which were attended by 7,600 people in all.

News of Branch Centres

The newly set-up cancer centre at **Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission Sevashrama, Vrindaban** hospital was inaugurated on 4 January.

Ramakrishna Mission Seva Pratishthan, Kolkata conducted a round-the-clock medical camp during Makar Sankranti Mela at Sagar Island in South 24-Parganas district from 10 to 16 January. In all, 7,100 patients were treated, out of which 242 received indoor medical care.

On the occasion of Gangasagar Mela,

Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Manasad-wip held a camp at the Mela area from 11 to 16 January. In all, 875 pilgrims were provided with free board and lodging. In addition, free meals were served to about 3,000 non-resident pilgrims from 13 to 15 January. Discourses and devotional singing were also arranged in the camp.

Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, Kamarpukur held a kisan mela, farmers' fair, on 16 and 17 January in which about 600 farmers took part.

Swami Gautamanandaji inaugurated the monks' quarters at **Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission Sevashrama, Garbeta** on 19 January, the sacred birthday of Swami Brahmananda.


Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Ranchi Morabadi held a kisan mela at a village in Khunti District on 20 January, visited by about 10,000 farmers.

The first floor of the cerebral palsy clinic at **Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Visakhapatnam** was inaugurated on 23 January.

Brigadier (Dr) B D Mishra, Governor of Arunachal Pradesh, visited **Ramakrishna Mission, Narottam Nagar** on 30 January and participated in its annual prize-giving function.

The Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) has recently issued a circular to all its affiliated schools recommending deployment of **Ramakrishna Mission, Delhi's** Awakened Citizen Programme in their schools. It is a three-year graded values education programme for students studying in class 6 and above.

Relief

Economic Rehabilitation: The following centres distributed necessary items to poor and needy people: **Chandipur:** 6 sewing machines on 3 January. **Rahara:** 3 sewing machines and a tricycle on 29 December and 14 January. 

Appeal for Human Excellence

“They alone live, who live for others” — Swami Vivekananda.

Friends and Devotees,

Situated in the mystical foothills and natural greenery and beauty of the sub Himalayan range, in 1928, some inspired devotees of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda started a new Ashrama in Jalpaiguri. In 1941, the center was affiliated to the Ramakrishna Mission, Belur Math 1941 as a branch centre. In addition to serving as an abode for spiritual sadhakas, this Ashrama has been engaging itself in different philanthropic activities, including a Students Home, Value Education, Integrated Child Development project, Charitable Dispensary, Library and Reading Room, Relief and Welfare Works and others.



We humbly appeal for your generous contribution towards the construction of Vivekananda Sabha Griha (depicted above), a multipurpose hall (resembling the historic Art Institute of Chicago of 1893) with the revised estimated cost about Rs.4.66 Crores, having an area of 16,000 sq. ft with a seating capacity of more than 1300 persons. It will serve as a convention hall for students, youth, and the general public, living in

the remote areas of North Bengal, to inspire human excellence, culture, philanthropy, spirituality, and most importantly national unity.

We also wish to inform that if any donor wishes to perpetuate the memory of his/her loving one, he/she may do so by contributing an appropriate amount. We would honour the donor's desire by displaying a suitable plaque to honour the deceased. Interested donors are requested to make inquiries in this regard to the Secretary, Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Ashramapara, Mission Road, Jalpaiguri-735101, West Bengal, India.

Donations may be contributed either through A/C payee cheque / draft, or money order that will be thankfully accepted and acknowledged. Cheques / drafts may kindly be drawn in favour of Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Jalpaiguri.

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Your contribution will go a long way in ensuring timely completion of this noble project.

May Sri Ramakrishna shower his blessings on all your endeavour is our sincere prayer.

Jalpaiguri

9th December, 2017

Yours in the service of the Lord,

**Swami Shivapremananda,
Secretary**



Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama

(A branch centre of Ramakrishna Mission, Belur Math, Howrah: 711002)

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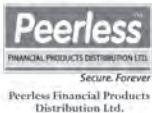
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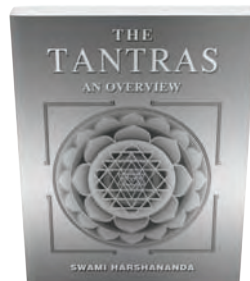
This book designed with colourful illustrations narrates in a simple language the life stories of the ten incarnations of Sri Mahavishnu, their glories and their divine mission on earth. The book is meant especially for children.

The Tantras: An Overview

Swami Harshananda

Tantras are less known to and much less understood by many, even by those following the Vedic way of life. Apart from enriching the philosophical thought of Hinduism, tantras have also contributed many ritualistic customs and practices in the field of religious endeavour.

The book, authored by Swami Harshananda, a senior monk of the Ramakrishna Order, gives a brief overview of the philosophy and practices of the tantras.



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This book for children is a collection of stories about nine devotees of Sri Panduranga or Sri Krishna. The stories of Pundarika, Chokamela, Neelobhaji, Kanakadasa, Haridas, Kabirdas, Raakha, Jayadeva and Shivaji who were blessed by Vittala are explained through colourful illustrations. The spiritual kernel is also explained through the teachings of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda at the end of each story.



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**Swami Vivekananda Marg (Beed Bypass),
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The Universal Temple of Bhagwan Shri Ramakrishna (Under Construction) An earnest Appeal for generous donations

Dear Sir / Madam,

Please accept our greetings and best wishes.

Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Aurangabad located on Swami Vivekananda Marg (Beed Bypass) is a branch center affiliated to Headquarters, Belur Math (near Kolkata). This ashrama is conducting various service activities in the field of health, education, child welfare, as well as spreading spiritual message of eternal religion as propounded by Shri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda.

This ashrama has taken up a new project of erecting a temple of Shri Ramakrishna. The work was commenced in December 2009; the temple will be inaugurated on **17th November 2018**.

The temple will be a unique and imposing monumental structure of its kind in entire Marathwada region in general and Aurangabad city in particular. It will add a cultural and spiritual dimension to the historical city of Aurangabad. It will be a great attraction and a place for worship, prayer, meditation and inspiration for the local people. It is also expected that the good number of general public visiting Aurangabad city as tourists for visiting world heritage sites such as Ellora & Ajanta and pilgrims for visiting Ghrishneshwar Jyotirling, Shirdi, Paithan etc. will include visit to the temple in their itinerary. It is aimed for the benefit of one and all without distinction of caste, creed, and nationality.

The estimated cost of the entire project is Rs. 25 Crores. So far Rs. 20.00 Crores have been spent through public contribution. The balance amount of Rs. 05.00 Crores is needed to complete the construction of the Temple.

We earnestly appeal to you to donate generously for this noble cause. Your support will indeed go a long way in our endeavor to erect this magnificent architectural edifice in the memory of Shri Ramakrishna who was the unique harmonizer of all the religions of the world and who dedicated his life to bring peace and welfare of mankind.

We value your help and co-operation immensely.

Yours in the service of the Lord,

Vishnupadananda

(Swami Vishnupadananda)
 Secretary

Temple Inauguration Day : 17th November 2018

Details regarding participation in the inauguration function will be made available in due course.



Temple Dimensions :

Length: 156 ft. **Breadth:** 076 ft. **Height:** 100 ft.

Temple Construction Area : 18000 Sq.ft.

Garbhagriha : 24ft. x 24ft.

Temple Hall for Prayer and Meditation :

70ft. x 40ft. Seating Capacity - 450

Auditorium (Ground Floor) :

80ft. x 57ft. Seating Capacity - 500

The entire Temple will be built in Chunar sandstone and interior in Ambaji and Makarana marble. Ceiling of the Temple Hall will be done in Teak Wood

Estimated Cost : Rs. 25 Crores

We accept Online donations. You may please credit your donation directly on our Online State Bank of India, MIT Branch, Aurangabad, A/c No. 30697728250, (Branch Code : 10791, IFSC Code:- SBIN0010791) We request Online donors to intimate us, on our email id (rkmaurangabad@gmail.com) his / her full Postal Address, Amount, PAN & Mobile Number. This is very important.

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- 2) Donations are eligible for tax exemption under section 80-G of I.T. Act 1961.



The First Monastery of Ramakrishna Order - Baranagar Math



Old Baranagar Math (1886-1892)

Dear Friend,

Ramakrishna Math, Baranagar (erstwhile Baranagar Math), the first monastery of Ramakrishna Sangha, was founded by Swami Vivekananda after Sri Ramakrishna Deva's mahasamadhi in 1886. Believed to be a haven for ghosts, the old decrepit building was taken on rent and it lasted for 5 years (approx.). This legendary monastery witnessed the amazing lives led by the tyagi disciples of Sri Ramakrishna Deva in deep *tapasya* and meditation overcoming penury and privation. Ramakrishnanandaji (desciple) started Sri Muru Maharaj's seva-puja in portraint and relies from here. It was here they took *sanyas* and shaped their lives to carry forward the Master's *bhava* and message to the world at large. Ultimately, Baranagar Math receded into the ruins of history, to be resurrected again in 2004 as a branch centre of Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, Belur Math.

Among its various activities, this centre has been running a free non-formal primary school catering to the poor slum dwelling children of this age-old locality. However, the present old school building has become utterly worn out and incapable of providing adequate space for the increasing number of students. Hence, it has been decided to build a new 5-storied building on a near-by own plot of land (although our present target is up to the second floor). It will house our school Gadadhar Sishu Vikas Kendra and Charitable Allopathic and Homeopathic Dispensary. However, the probable cost of construction has been estimated as under: -

(a) Cost of construction of foundation up to the Plinth Level	- Rs. 20.00 Lac (approx.)
(b) Cost of construction of Ground, First & Second Floor	- Rs. 1.97.00 Core "
Aggregate Cost	- Rs. 2.17.00 Core "

Candidly speaking, we are quite unable to bear the huge cost of construction as shown above. Hence, we fervently appeal to the devotees, patrons and well-wishers in India and abroad, to come forward with a helping hand to donate generously to our 'School-cum-Medical Service Building Fund'. We believe, without your kind help and co-operation, the dream project will ever remain unfulfilled.

Your donation may kindly be made by cheque drawn in the name of 'Ramakrishna Math, Baranagar' and sent to 125/1, Pramanick Ghat Road, Kolkata - 700 036 or by NEFT/RTGS to our HDFC Bank, Cossipore Branch, 67, Cossipore Road, Kolkata - 700 036 (IFS Code HDFC0004481) Savings Bank Account No. 50100196928813. All such donations are eligible for exemption under 80G of Income Tax Act. **Kindly visit at www.rkmbaranagar.org** to know more about us.

With thanks and *namaskar*,

Kolkata, April 15, 2018.

Yours in the Lord,
Swami Vamanananda
Adhyaksha

The best guide in life is strength.
In religion, as in all other matters,
discard everything that weakens
you, have nothing to do with it.
—Swami Vivekananda

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Swami Vivekananda's statue
at Museum, RKM New Delhi

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